THE IMMORTAL THOR

EWING
BAZALDUA
HOLLINGSWORTH

DEATH OF THE IMMORTAL THOR

MARVEL

"Sort of tale that leaves you buzzing, breathless and desperate for more."
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THE STORY ENDS...

THE HOUR HAD COME FOR THE ODINSON, who stood before the gates of the Utgardhall and his final death — the death he fought for. Many challenges awaited before the end. Skurge the Executioner with Bloodaxe in hand and ready for battle. The Utgard-Loki who the Odinson had never yet defeated. Nrgl, Lord of Murder-in-Darkness, in his own place of power, the beast at the center of the maze Kemur who was bull and hawk and serpent, who was fire and the sword. Alone stood the Odinson between the Gods of Utgard and all they would break asunder. And at the end of his tale, Thor Odinson strode into Vidblainn, third land of the dead, from whence nothing could return. Where one last time he fought for justice against the great Serpent to decide his fate.

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COLLECTING *IMMORTAL THOR #21-25* — BY AL EWING, JAN BAZALDUA,
JUSTIN GREENWOOD, PASQUAL FERRY, MATT HOLLINGSWORTH AND ROMULO FAJARDO JR.

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"BROTHERS SHALL FIGHT,
AND SLAY EACH OTHER;
COUSINS SHALL KINSHIP VIOLATE.
THE EARTH RESOUNDS,
THE GIANTESSES FLEE;
NO MAN WILL ANOTHER SPARE."

– FROM "VÖLUSPÂ, THE VALA'S PROPHECY,"
THE ELDER EDDAS OF SAEMUND SIGFUSSON

There is a bridge called **Gjallerbru**.
It crosses the river **Gjoll**, at the borderland of Hel, and it is where **Skurge the Executioner** took his last stand and last laugh.
Until that moment, he had lived as **lackwit** and **lackey**, loving but not **loved**, serving but **ill served**. Now he **rewrote** his story.
The finest hour of Skurge's life was when he stole **the death of Thor** and bore it upon his back.
BUDDA BUDDA
BUDDA BUDDA
But it was not the **last** hour.

Strange how none needed Skurge when he lived and pined and wept among them.
TO BATTLE, EINHERJAR! AND MAY WE BANISH HEL'S FOUL LEGIONS FROM THE LAND OF ASGARD!
Strange how all wished for Skurge after he had earned his great reward.
But when Asgard needed aid against Hel, who would refuse help from Asgard's noble dead?
HELA MUST BE PROTECTED. ARE YOU READY?
When Hel needed aid against Heven, who would refuse help from the noblest of them all?
How could the noblest of all refuse aid to any who inquired?
I WAS TOLD THIS LIFE WOULD BE DIFFERENT FROM MY LAST.
So again and again, Skurge crossed the threshold of death. Back and forth, forward and back, always for the best of reasons...
...or for any reason at all.
BETA RAY BILL! MY OLD FRIEND!
And with each new breath of life, his hold on Thor's stolen death grew weaker...

...until it slipped fully from his grasp.
no... no...
YOU WILL NOT PASS! NOT TO ASGARD, NOT TO MIDGARD, NOT TO ANY REALM TO WHICH THOR BELONGS!
I SWEAR IT ON MY BLOOD-- ON THE LAST DROP OF THAT BLOOD!
I SWEAR IT ON MY OWN DEATH!
NO!
YOU CAN'T HAVE IT.
YOU CAN'T HAVE IT BACK.
When the nightmares came to Valhalla, there was only one god Skurge could turn to...

...he who had built that great Hall.
Odin One-Eye.
I will not have it, Skurge.
I have seen love's flame turn to ash in my lover's eyes. I have died to my own magic--and lived as hammer and as anvil.
All this have I done, to see my son upon his throne as the true king.
And now--when he has at last learned all he must to rule the golden realm--you say his tale must end?
I say thee nay. I will not have it.
You are Asgard's executioner, and you will execute my will in this. You will take back the death you won fairly from my son--
How?
I've left too many times already. The door is barred to me now, by Brunnhilde herself.
I fear even you cannot open it...
Impudence.

BEHOLD ODIN! AM I NOT THE WAY OF WAYS? AM I NOT THE WONDER OF WONDERS?
BEHOLD ME, SKURGE!
F-FORGIVE ME, MY LIEGE! I MEANT NO DISRESPECT!
I ONLY MEANT THAT... WELL, YOU ARE DEAD...
YET THERE ARE DOORS I MAY STILL OPEN, DOUBTING ONE. DEATH BY MY HAND HERE IS LIFE IN OTHER REALMS.
BUT BE SURE, FOR SUCH A ROUTE BEARS ITS OWN TOLL...
AND I WILL PAY IT--
BE SURE. ONCE I TAKE THY LIFE IN VALHALLA, YOU CAN NEVER RETURN HERE. NOR WILL YOU HAVE A PLACE IN HEL.
SHOULD DEATH COME FOR YOU AGAIN, LONELY VIDBLAINN WILL BE THY DESTINATION.
VIDBLAINN AND THE SLEEP WITH NO WAKING. THE TRUE END.
DEATH EVEN FOR A GOD.
...
THEN SO IT MUST GO.
And so it went.

So it went.
FACE ME, THUNDERER!
Skurge met with Thor, deep in the dark wood that held the gate to Utgard...
...and he brought death with him.
FACE ME ONE LAST TIME!
THANOS...?
OH, NO.
NOTHING SO SMALL AS THAT.

RRAAHHH!
UNNH!
FOCUS, THOR.
EVEN IF THAT IS THANOS, I CANNOT BE DISTRACTED.
SKURGE MEANS TO TAKE MY PLACE ON THIS QUEST--TO STEAL WHATEVER DESTINY THE FATES INTEND FOR ME.
AND HE WILL NOT HOLD BACK. HIS BLOOD IS UP, AND IN HIS EYES I NEED ONLY BE ALIVE AT THIS BATTLE'S END...
...NOT IN ONE PIECE.

TOO TRUE. AND IF ANYONE CAN CHOP THE ALL-FATHER INTO PIECES, IT'S PROUD SKURGE, WHOSE BLOODAXE WHISTLES LIKE THE CUTTING WIND.
WHILE YOU CAN BARELY USE YOURS TO SHIELD YOURSELF...
YOU HEAR MY THOUGHTS?
WHAT ARE YOU...?
A GOD OF ASGARD! A GOD WORTHY OF A GREAT TALE--A GREAT ENDING--
NOT YOU. YOU DON'T SEE HIM?
HE STANDS BEHIND THE GATE-- IF YOU ONLY TURN YOUR HEAD, YOU WILL SEE HIM FOR YOURSELF--
"LOOK BEHIND YOU"?
STICK TO YOUR HAMMER, THOR--
UFFF!
--A TRICKSTER YOU'RE NOT!

THUNNK
HNN!
HE CAN'T SEE ME, THOR. HE HASN'T EARNED ME YET.
I AM STILL THE FACE OF YOUR DEATH...
THE FACE OF THANOS? EVEN NOW?
IT IS THE FACE YOU ASSOCIATE WITH YOUR END, ODINSON. THE FACE YOU HAVE LEARNED TO FEAR, TO HATE...TO FIGHT, WHENEVER YOU SEE IT.
AND NOW?
WILL YOU REALLY FIGHT TO OPEN THIS GATE AND JOIN ME?

WILL YOU RAISE YOUR HAMMER AGAINST THIS NOBLE GOD, THIS HERO OF ASGARD?
BRAVE, LOYAL SKURGE, WHO ONLY EVER SOUGHT TO TAKE THE BURDEN FROM YOU?
IT IS NOT THY BURDEN TO TAKE, SKURGE!
I BEG YOU-- LOWER THY AX! THY ALL-FATHER COMMANDS IT!
AND IF I DO, MY LORD AND LIEGE?
WILL YOU LET ME JOIN YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY TO UTGARDHALL? WILL YOU TREAT ME AS ALL-FATHER SHOULD TREAT EINHERJAR-- AS A WARRIOR, WORTHY OF RESPECT?
OR ARE YOU ASKING ME TO PLAY THE COWARD?
...
I MADE A VOW, SKURGE. UPON MY OWN BLOOD. AND ON MY BLOOD WILL I KEEP IT.
NO LIFE FOR MINE.
WELL. THAT'S UNFORTUNATE, THOR.
BECAUSE I ALSO MADE A VOW...

...AND I'LL KEEP IT ON YOUR BLOOD TOO!
ARRGH!
AND WITH THE SPILLING OF BLOOD--THERE COMES NEW STRENGTH!
ULLR MADE THIS AX. THOR-- THE LORD OF THE YEW. GOD OF DARK DOOMS. AND HE TIED MY SOUL TO IT--SO THE MORE BLOOD IT TASTES, THE STRONGER I BECOME.
THERE IS A COST FOR SUCH MAGIC, OF COURSE. SHOULD I FALL IN BATTLE, THE BLOODAXE WILL TAKE MY BLOOD... AND MY LIFE.
SO I WILL HAVE MY DEATH TODAY, THOR.
ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

YOU ARE MAD--
AS THE FOX IS. YOU CAN'T SAVE ME, THOR-- I KNEW YOU'D TRY, BUT NOW IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
SO WHAT WILL YOU DO? GIVE ME MY DEATH, OR KILL ME YOURSELF?
WHAT WILL YOU DO, THOR?
DO YOU KNOW?
YOU CAN STILL END THIS USELESS COMBAT--
AND GO HOME WITH MY TAIL BETWEEN MY LEGS? BE SKURGE THE FOOL ONCE MORE?
I WILL NOT LET YOU TAKE THIS DEATH-- OR TAKE THE GLORY--
TO HEL WITH MY DAMNED GLORY! AND WITH YOURS!
ALL THAT MATTERS IS THE MORTALS THE MAD UTGARD-GODS WOULD DESTROY--
BUT DO THEY MATTER, THOR?
WHY?

BE *SILENT.*
THE MORTALS DO NOT CARE ABOUT *YOU.* OR EVEN ABOUT ***THEMSELVES.***
AT EVERY TURN, WHEN FACED WITH EVEN A ***GLIMMER*** OF LIGHT, THEY CHOOSE ***DARKNESS.***
THEY ***CANNOT*** BE SAVED, ANY MORE THAN ***SKURGE*** CAN.
THEY ***WANT*** TO DIE. THEY WANT TO KILL ***EVERYTHING ELSE.*** THAT IS WHAT PEOPLE ***ARE,*** THOR.
A ***SELF-HATING DISEASE...***
NO, MONSTER.
THAT I WILL ***NEVER*** ACCEPT.
EH?
WHO ARE YOU ***TALKING*** TO...?
HOW ***CAN*** YOU DISAGREE WHEN IT IS SO SELF-EVIDENT? WHY MUST YOU DIE FOR THEM ***NOW,*** THOR?
THEY ***CHOSE*** TO KILL THE WORLD. DON'T THEY DESERVE TO FACE THE ***CONSEQUENCES?***
...
AND WHAT DOES A ***CHILD*** DESERVE?

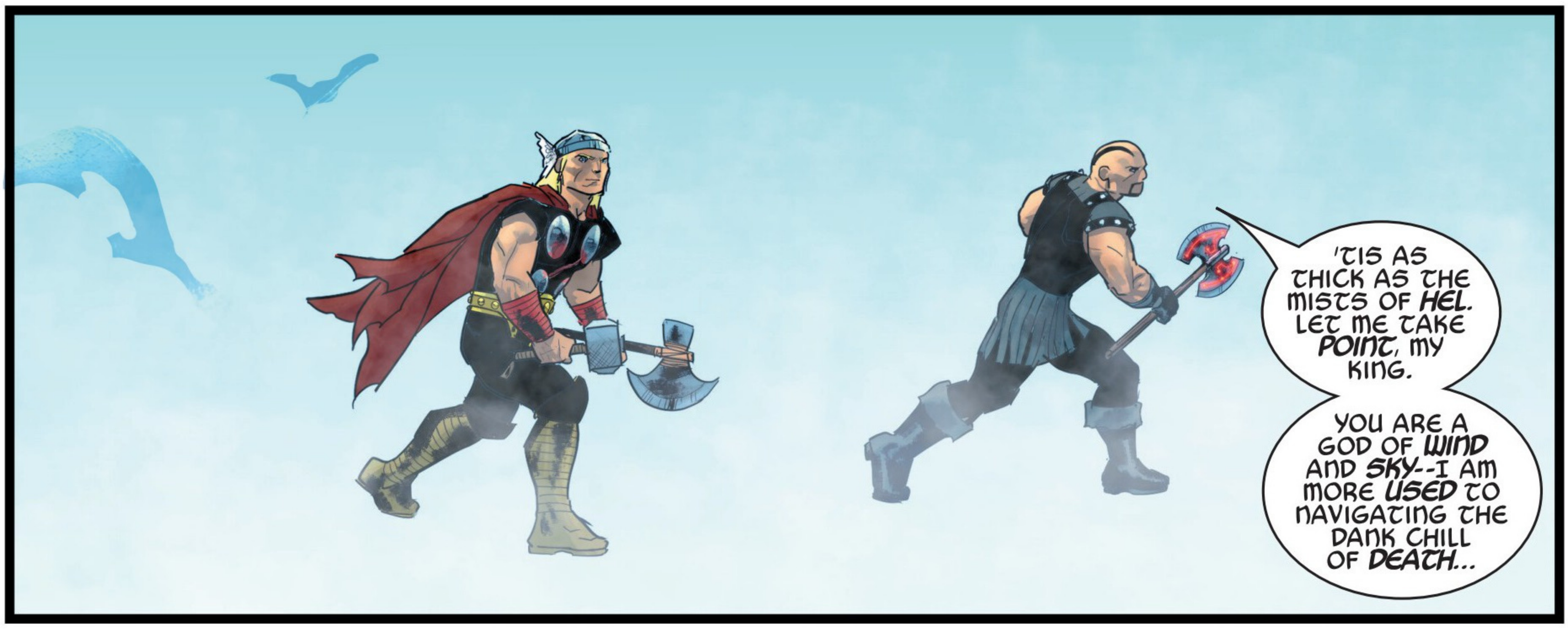
WHAT DO THEY DESERVE WHO HAVE FOUGHT *TOOTH AND NAIL?* WHO FIGHT ON *STILL?* AM I TO SURRENDER BEFORE *THEY* DO?
WHAT WOULD THAT *MAKE* ME?
I SAY THEE *NAY*, NOTHING-BELIEVER. I SAY *NEVER.*
IF THERE ARE BUT A *THOUSAND* ON THE EARTH WHO EMBRACE THE *WARMTH* IN THEIR SOULS--WHO SEEK *KINDNESS*, WHO SHARE *JUSTICE* AND *LOVE*--I WILL *FIGHT* FOR THAT THOUSAND!
IF THERE ARE BUT A *HUNDRED*, I WILL FIGHT! IF THERE ARE *TEN-- I WILL FIGHT!*
IF THERE IS ONLY *ONE SOUL REMAINING* UPON THE *WHOLE EARTH* WHO KNOWS *LOVE*...I WILL *BATTLE TO THE END* FOR THAT ONE! *AND THEY FOR ME!*
TO SAY OTHERWISE IS TO *GIVE UP!*
AND I WILL NOT GIVE UP, THANOS. I *CANNOT* GIVE UP.
WE CANNOT GIVE UP.

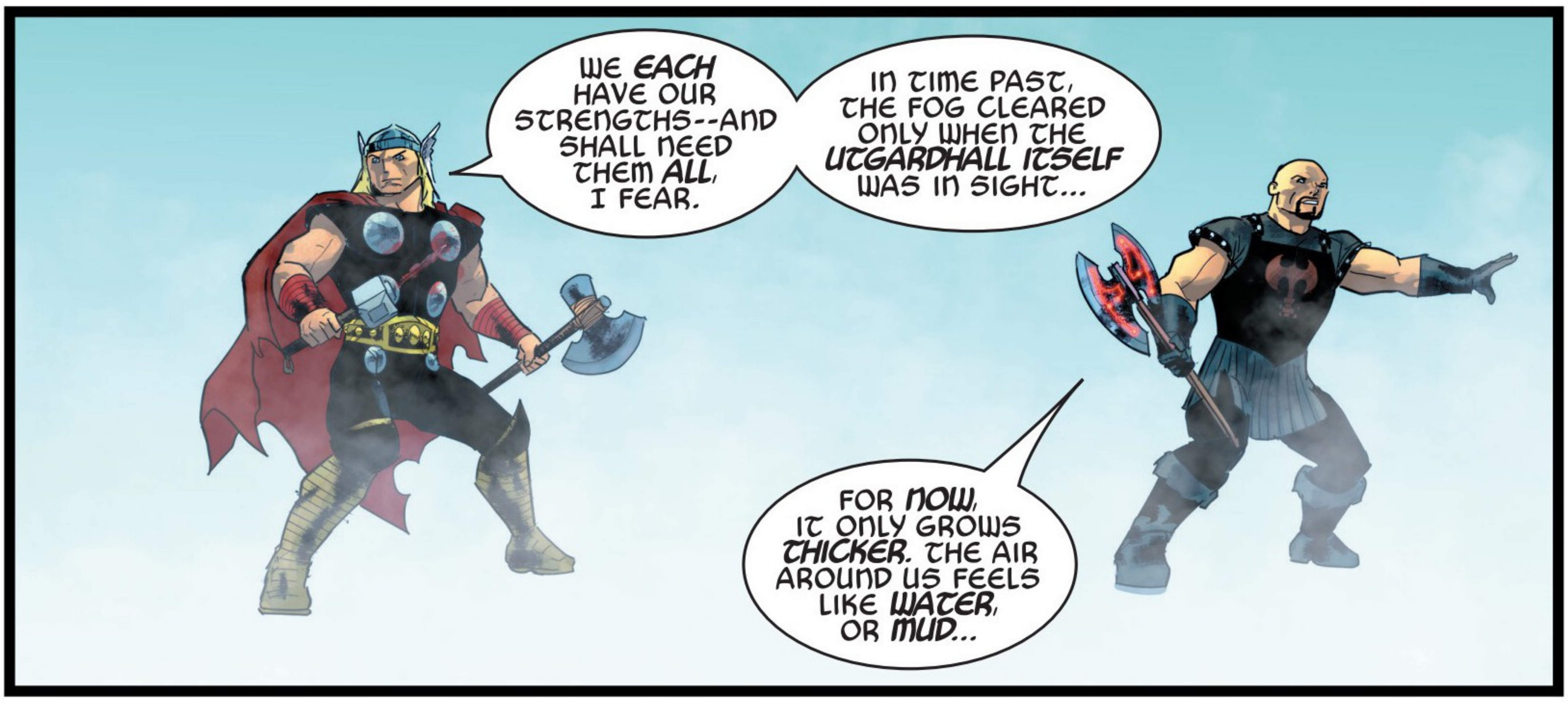
TAKE IT.
...IS THIS A *TRICK?*
AS YOU SAY, I AM NO GREAT TRICKSTER.
YOU SAY I MUST LET YOU DIE OR KILL YOU, SKURGE. I SAY I AM *TIRED* OF BEING TOLD WHAT I MUST DO.
YOU LONG AGO PROVED YOURSELF *WORTHY* OF THE HAMMER...
...SO TAKE IT AND *FOLLOW*, MY EINHERJAR. TO *UTGARD*, AND ALL THE PERIL IT MAY THROW AT US.
YOU ARE *RIGHT* AND I WAS *WRONG*--SO *FIGHT AT MY SIDE*, MY HAMMER IN THY HAND, AS MY *FRIEND* AND MY *COMRADE*.
THOR, I...I *TOLD* YOU.
I CANNOT *LET* YOU...
THEN BLUDGEON IN MY SKULL AND GO ALONE.
CHOOSE.

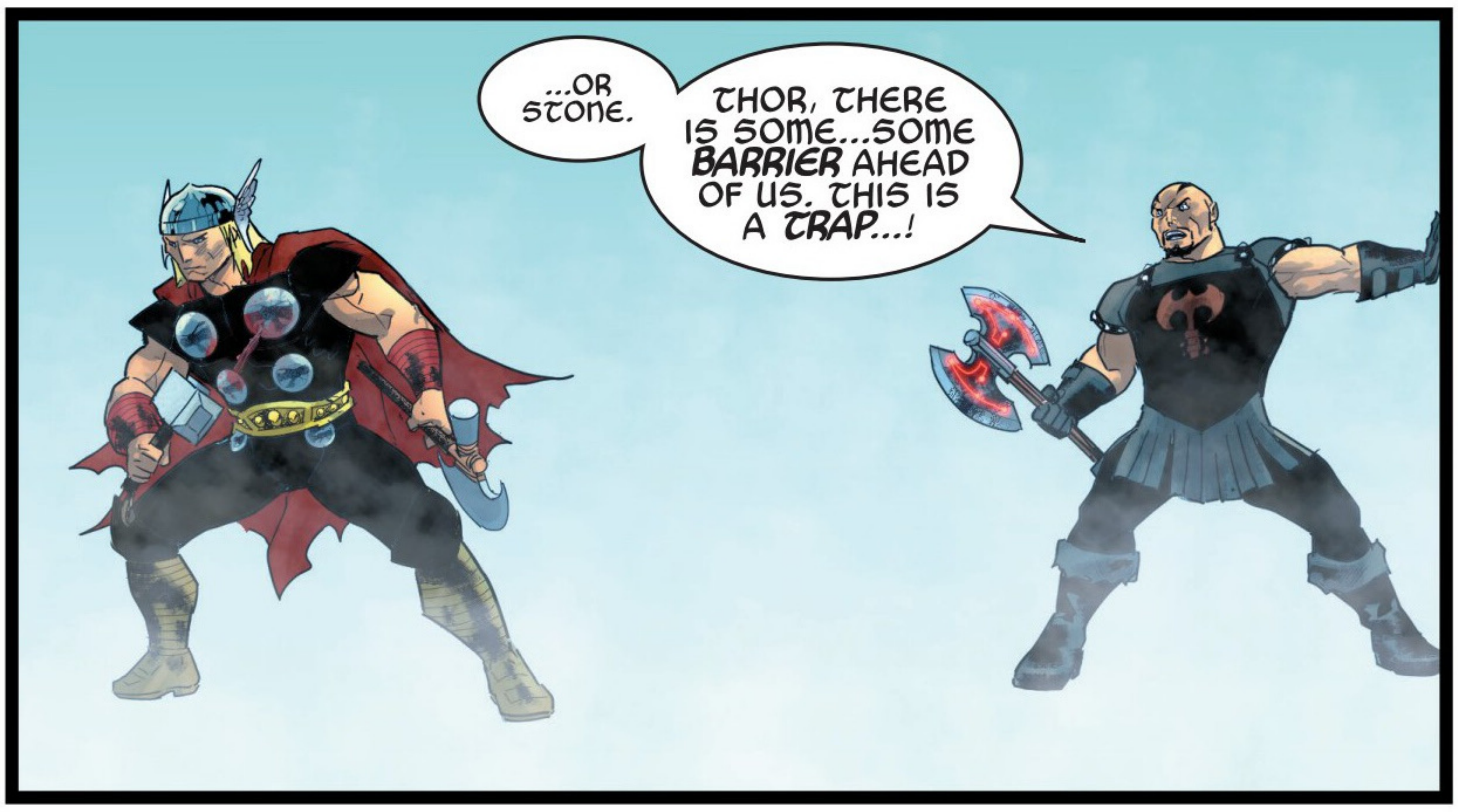
YOU SHAME ME, ALL-FATHER.
AS YOU HAVE SHAMED **ME.**
I **MISLIKE** BEING CODDLED LIKE AN INFANT. MY **FATHER** SENT YOU TO ME FOR THAT VERY PURPOSE-- AND IT **RANKLED** ME.
THUS, WHEN I CROSSED THE **BLACK BRIDGE**, I ORDERED A NOBLE FRIEND WHO CARES FOR ME TO REMAIN **BEHIND.**
BECAUSE I FEARED FOR **HER** IN THE FACE OF MY FATE? **AYE**--AND BECAUSE I WISHED **CONTROL** OVER THAT FATE.
BUT WHO IS EVEN THE **ALL-FATHER** TO MAKE SUCH EDICTS? WHO AM I TO TELL YOU **NO**, SKURGE?
A **KING** MAY COMMAND THE SEA-- A **WARRIOR** TAKE HIS AX TO THE CRASHING WAVES.
BUT THE **TIDE STILL COMES IN.**
CRE-EEE-EEAAK
THE **FATES** WILL HAVE THEIR **SAY**...

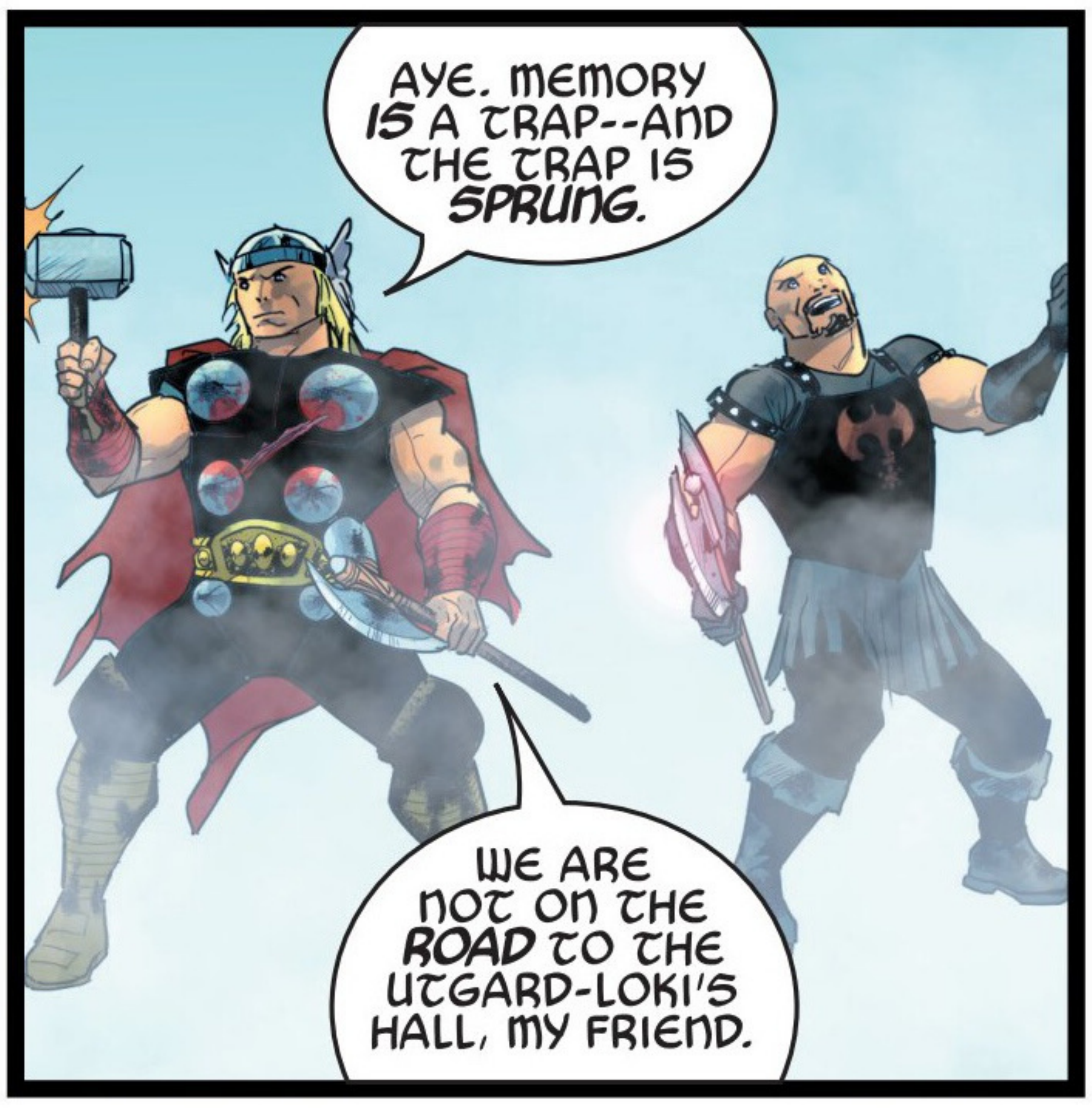
...AND THERE ARE FORCES TO WHICH EVEN A **GOD** MUST BOW.
BUT NOT YET.
...
NO.
NOT **YET.**
WHO **IS** IT YOU SPEAK TO...?
NO ONE WHO **MATTERS**. FATE LIES NOT WITH **OLD FEARS** BUT WITH **YOU AND I**, MY FRIEND... AND WHAT WE NOW DO.
AND AS I **RECALL** IT, THE PATH TO UTGARD TAKES US...

...THROUGH THE DEEP WOODS.
UH!
THE-- THE FOREST CHANGES BEFORE MY EYES--
IT WILL TWIST AS QUICKLY AS ANY TALE. WE ARE IN UTGARD NOW, SKURGE-- BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW. BEYOND ALL CHARTS, ALL MAPS, ALL RULE AND THEORY.
WE HAVE TRANSCENDED FROM PROSE TO POETRY-- FROM HARD TRUTH TO FLOATING, FLOWING METAPHOR.
SO HOLD THY AX TIGHT, GOOD EXECUTIONER. KEEP A GRIP ON THAT, RATHER THAN ON THY CERTAINTIES.
WEAPONS CRAFTED BY MAGIC WILL BE USEFUL IN THIS PLACE...
...BUT ONLY SO USEFUL.
I REMEMBER THIS FOG FROM BEFORE ALSO. BE ON THY GUARD.


'TIS AS THICK AS THE MISTS OF HEL. LET ME TAKE POINT, MY KING.
YOU ARE A GOD OF WIND AND SKY--I AM MORE USED TO NAVIGATING THE DANK CHILL OF DEATH...


WE EACH HAVE OUR STRENGTHS--AND SHALL NEED THEM ALL, I FEAR.
IN TIME PAST, THE FOG CLEARED ONLY WHEN THE UTGARDHALL ITSELF WAS IN SIGHT...
FOR NOW, IT ONLY GROWS THICKER. THE AIR AROUND US FEELS LIKE WATER, OR MUD...


...OR STONE.
THOR, THERE IS SOME...SOME BARRIER AHEAD OF US. THIS IS A TRAP...!


AYE. MEMORY IS A TRAP--AND THE TRAP IS SPRUNG.
WE ARE NOT ON THE ROAD TO THE UTGARD-LOKI'S HALL, MY FRIEND.

TWO DID ENTER

“BESIDE THE POUNDING CATARACTS
OF MIDNIGHT STREAMS UNKNOWN TO US
’TIS BUILDED IN THE LEAFLESS TRACTS
AND VALLEYS HUGE OF TARTARUS.
LURID AND LOFTY AND VAST IT SEEMS;
IT HATH NO ROUNDED NAME THAT RINGS,
BUT I HAVE HEARD IT CALLED IN DREAMS
THE CITY OF THE END OF THINGS.”

- FROM “THE CITY OF THE END OF THINGS,”
ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN

When Thor awoke, he was--
NO. I THINK NOT.
LOKI IS THE SKALD OF ALL THE REALMS...BUT THIS IS NO REALM, AS REALMS ARE COUNTED.
I AM THE UTGARD-LOKI. HERE I AM THE TRICKSTER, TAMER OF MONSTERS AND TELLER OF TALES. HERE I AM MASTER-MAGICIAN.
AND THIS IS A MAGIC TRICK.
HOW MANY COINS AM I HOLDING?

WRONG.
I HOLD **NO** COINS.
A COIN IS WHAT IT **DOES**. IF IT HAS NO **VALUE**-- IF IT IS NOT PART OF A **GREATER BARGAIN**-- IT IS NOT TRULY A **COIN**, ONLY A DISC OF METAL.
WHEN A COIN **BECOMES** A COIN, IT BECOMES A **SYMBOL** FOR AN ENTIRE **SYSTEM**--A **DYING PLANET**, FOR EXAMPLE. OR AN **ENDLESS CITY**.
THE COIN IS THE CITY AND THE CITY IS THE COIN AND THE COIN IS A **TRAP**.
BECAUSE WHEN A COIN **IS** A COIN, IT IS **TWO** COINS. AND EACH SIDE, EACH **FACE**, PAYS YOU BACK IN ITS **OWN WAY**.
TAILS.
THE SERPENT ENCIRCLES **YOU** AS IT EATS **ITSELF**. CIRCLES THE **WORLD**, AN ENEMY **PROPHESIED** BUT NEVER **DEFEATED**.
THE COIN TAKES YOU BACK TO WHAT YOU **THOUGHT** YOU'D LEFT **BEHIND**.
HEADS.
NOW THE COIN IS **WITH** YOU. IT MOVES YOU **ON**, PUSHES YOU **FORWARD**...BUT TO WHAT? **FOR** WHAT?
WHAT **WAITS** AT THE END OF THE MAZE?

IF YOU'RE HERE AGAIN, YOU UNDERSTAND HOW IT WORKS. THE COIN IS THE CITY. THE CITY IS THE COIN.
I HAVE NO SAY IN WHAT A COIN IS, OF COURSE. I AM NOT THE CITY. I AM NOT THE GREAT SYSTEM THAT EATS AND FEEDS.
I AM NOT NRGL.
SO YOU'LL HAVE TO USE YOUR OWN. YOU HAVE ONE, DON'T YOU? THERE ARE COINS ALL AROUND YOU.
IT'S THE SYMBOL OF THE MATERIAL WORLD FOR A REASON. IT'S ALREADY EATEN YOUR WORLD, YOUR LIFE, YOUR IMAGINATION.
SO CALL IT IN THE AIR. LET IT ANSWER.
IS IT TAILS OR HEADS? ARE YOU GOING BACKWARDS OR FORWARDS? HOW MANY COINS ARE THERE?
DO YOU KNOW?

THOR KNEW NOTHING FOR A LONG TIME.
THERE WAS ONLY DARKNESS... AND A STRANGELY FAMILIAR PAIN IN HIS SKULL.
AND THEN HE AWOKE.
WHO...WHO SPEAKS...?
WHERE AM I...?
...
UTGARD.
UTGARD, ONCE AGAIN.
IT ALL COMES BACK. I WAS IN THE COMPANY OF SKURGE--BOTH OF US IN THE SAME TRAP--AND THEN DARKNESS.
I MUST FIND HIM. AS MUCH AS THIS TERRAIN CAN BE KNOWN, I KNOW IT--AND HE DOES NOT.
AFTER ALL, I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE...
...AND NOW I AM HERE AGAIN.

THOR!
SKURGE...?
I WAS JUST LOOKING FOR YOU--
I WAS LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT OF HERE. BUT NO SUCH LUCK.
ANOTHER PATH, ANOTHER DEAD END.
HAVE I SAID THAT ALREADY?
HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN HERE...?
SKURGE!
BEHIND YOU!
GAH! MORE OF THE CREATURES WHO INHABIT THIS PLACE! THEY ARE ALL AROUND US--AND STRONGER THAN THEY LOOK!
WATCH YOUR BACK, THOR--
UNNHH!
WHAM!

AYE-- FORMIDABLE CREATURES *INDEED!*
DESPITE MY ***BELT OF ENDURANCE*** AND MY ***OWN*** GODLY STRENGTH, THEIR BLOWS MAKE MY HEAD SPIN LIKE ***MJOLNIR...***
...READYING FOR *THIS!*
AND PERHAPS THAT EXPLAINS THE STRANGE ***DEJA VU*** THAT HAS COME UPON ME...
LET US MAKE ***HASTE,*** SKURGE--
--I FEAR ***MORE*** WILL SOON ARRIVE!
SKURGE?
THAP

AND I FEAR, MY LIEGE--
--THAT THEY ARE ALREADY UPON US!
THE CREATURES BESET HIM ON ALL SIDES--IN ANOTHER MOMENT, THEY WILL DRAG HIM UNDER THEIR MASS!
AND IF SKURGE SHOULD LOSE ANY BATTLE, THE CURSE ON HIS OWN BLOODAXE WILL SLAY HIM!
SO HE MUST NOT BATTLE ALONE!
HOLD FAST, MY FRIEND!
WE FIGHT TOGETHER--
--UNTIL THE VERY END!
MY THANKS, THOR!
ALONE, THEY ARE SMALL TROUBLE...
...BUT AS A CROWD, THEY ARE FORMIDABLE.
AND THEIR REACH IS HARD TO ESCAPE.

ESCAPE WILL COME. FOR NOW, WE HAVE BOUGHT *TIME.*
TIME TO *MOVE*--AND, PERHAPS, FOR THE THREE OF US TO PLAN OUR NEXT...
...WAS THERE NOT *ANOTHER ONE* OF US HERE JUST NOW? I CANNOT RECALL.
ONLY WE *TWO* ENTERED THE *UTGARD-GATE*--I RECALL *THAT.*
WHO ELSE *WOULD* THERE BE?
I FEEL I SHOULD *KNOW.* BUT SOMETHING *IN* THIS PLACE--THE *TWISTS* AND *TURNS* OF IT, THE REPEATING *SAMENESS*--CONFUSES THE *MIND.*
THE BELT YOLGJÖRD SHOULD *PROTECT* ME FROM SUCH THINGS...
DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING?
...HOWEVER, UTGARD-LOKI IS NOT A *WEAVER* OF SPELLS, BUT THEIR *EMBODIMENT.* NO *TRICKSTER,* BUT *THE CONCEPT OF THE TRICK.*
WHAT USE IS A MAGICAL *WEAPON* AGAINST ONE WHO IS *MAGIC ITSELF?*
I FEAR THAT I AM *ILL-EQUIPPED* FOR THIS JOURNEY, MY FRIEND.
I FEAR THERE ARE BATTLES COMING THAT *CANNOT BE FOUGHT.*

LISTEN. THE SOUND COMES CLOSER NOW.
AYE. LIKE THUNDER AND RUSHING WIND...
READY YOURSELF--
--FOR ANYTHING.
OD'S BLOOD.
HERMOD!
I--I FEARED YOU LOST--
YOU DID? I WAS GONE ONLY A MOMENT.
WASN'T I?
STILL--I HAVE FOUND YOU, THOR, AS I JUST WISH I HAD FOUND YOU ELSEWHERE.
DID I TELL YOU THAT?
I...I AM SORRY FOR MY CONFUSION, BROTHER. IT IS THE CITY.
THIS LIVING, ENDLESS CITY.
'TIS A MAZE WITH NO ESCAPE.

YOU WERE TAKEN BY OBLIVION, HERMOD--WHEN HE POSSESSED OUR BROTHER TYR. DON'T YOU REMEMBER?
YOU WERE REMOVED FROM EXISTENCE--
AYE! AYE, THAT PART I RECALL.
SO I SUPPOSE I AM NOW OUTSIDE EXISTENCE--IN THIS REALM THAT IS NO REALM AT ALL. BUT WE'VE SPOKEN OF THIS, THOR... HAVEN'T WE?
HAVE WE? THIS PLACE PLAYS TRICKS ON THE MEMORY, BROTHER.
I RECALL THINGS I HAVE NOT YET DONE AND FORGET THINGS I HAVE...
A FUNCTION OF THE LIVING CITY. DAYS, HOURS, MOMENTS, ALL REPEAT--ONE AFTER ANOTHER, YET ALWAYS THE SAME.
BACKWARD AND FORWARD, AGAIN AND AGAIN. I HAVE BEEN HERE FOR...A LONG TIME...
...AND THERE IS NO MORE TIME TO BE LOST!
WAIT HERE--I'LL FIND YOU AGAIN IN A MOMENT!
HERMOD! WE MUST STAY TOGETHER--
TOO LATE. ONLY HIS ECHO REMAINS, VANISHING INTO THE DISTANCE.
WELL, IF HE HAS ABANDONED US... YOU HAVE ME, MY LIEGE.

THERE. I'VE SCOUTED A MILE AROUND.
THE CITY DWELLERS-- THOSE EYELESS BEINGS--THEY LIKE TO CROWD TOGETHER. BUT THERE ARE WAYS THROUGH...
WAYS THROUGH TO WHERE, HERMOD?
THAT IS THE QUESTION WE ASK OURSELVES AGAIN AND AGAIN. FOR AS FAR AS I'VE RUN, I'VE YET TO FIND A WAY OUT...
THEN WE MUST SEEK A WAY FURTHER IN.
IF THIS CITY IS A LIVING THING-- A GOD UNTO ITSELF-- IT MUST HAVE A HEART. AND A HEART MAY BE STOPPED, IF NEEDS MUST...
HA! SAY IT AGAIN, MY LIEGE!
AND IN TURN, I WILL SAY THAT WE HAVE EVERY TOOL WE NEED TO DO IT!
SWIFT LEGS TO SCOUT THE WAY AND STRONG ARMS TO FIGHT OUR WAY THROUGH!
AYE--AND KEEN EYES TO SEE WHAT OURS DO NOT. THE EXECUTIONER IS RIGHT, BROTHER.
I KNOW NOT HOW I WAS IMPRISONED HERE... BUT THAT IS THE PATH TO FREEDOM.

AYE. WHERE MIGHT THOSE *KEEN EYES* YOU SPOKE OF BE *FOUND*, HERMOD?
WHAT DO *YOU* KNOW THAT WE DO NOT...?
'TIS A PAINFUL TALE, BUT I WILL TELL IT *AGAIN*--FROM THE *BEGINNING*--AS BEST I *MAY*.
I WAS NOT THE *ONLY* GOD OF ASGARD TO FALL OUT OF THE WORLD, THOR.
"THERE WAS *ANOTHER*--ONE WHO DIED IN *BATTLE* YET *FORSOOK VALHALLA*. WHOSE *LAST WISH* WAS FOR HIS SPIRIT TO GO *BEYOND* THE REALMS HE HAD SEEN.
"HE WAS GRANTED THAT BOON BY THE VALKYRIE *JANE FOSTER*...
"...AND NOW *HEIMDALL THE BRIDGE-KEEPER* IS WITHIN THE ENDLESS CITY."
BECAUSE THIS IS WHERE GODS REMOVED FROM THE TEN REALMS GO. I UNDERSTAND *THAT*, HERMOD.
BUT IF HEIMDALL *IS* HERE--*WHY*, THEN, IS HE NOT WITH...?
HOLD. A *MOMENT*, SKURGE.
I HEAR MOVEMENT.

THE STONE CREATURES ARE INDEED MASSING AHEAD OF US.
IF WE TAKE ANOTHER PATH, WE CAN PERHAPS AVOID THE WORST OF THEM...
PERHAPS--
--PERHAPS NOT!
THEY STRIKE FROM ABOVE AS WELL--
--AND TO AVOID A FIGHT IS NOT MY NATURE, HERMOD-- EVEN IF IT IS YOURS!
I HAVE FURTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT HEIMDALL'S FATE!
WE CANNOT TARRY HERE, SKURGE--
NAY! I WILL ASK UNTIL WE HAVE THE ANSWER!
WHERE DID YOU LEAVE HIM, HERMOD?
WHERE IS HEIMDALL NOW?

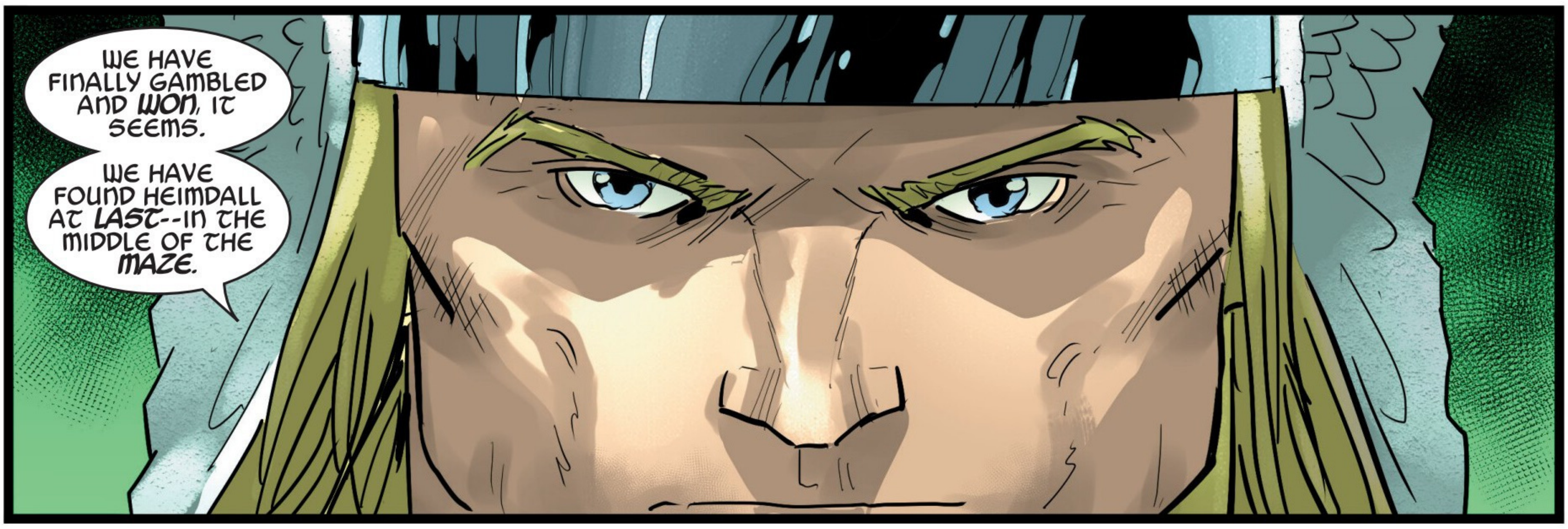
I KNOW NOT WHERE THEY TOOK HIM, SKURGE.
THEY TRIED TO TAKE ME AS WELL...BUT I WAS TOO FAST...
SO YOU DID LEAVE HIM BEHIND!
MAKE THE ACCUSATION A HUNDRED TIMES--YOU CANNOT JUDGE ME MORE THAN I HAVE JUDGED MYSELF, SKURGE.
BUT HEIMDALL ORDERED ME TO GO. TO FIND YOU, THOR.
I HAVE NOT RESTED A MOMENT SINCE...
AND YOU HAVE FOUND ME, HERMOD. THAT DUTY IS DONE--AND WE ALL HAVE ANOTHER.
IF HEIMDALL WAS CAPTURED, HE IS LIKELY AT THE CENTER OF THE MAZE--WHERE THE OPPOSITION WILL BE FIERCEST.
ALIVE OR DEAD, WE CANNOT LEAVE HIM THERE. WE MUST GO TO THE BELLY OF THE BEAST.
SO SCOUT AHEAD ONCE MORE, BROTHER.
WE GO WHERE THE ENEMY IS.

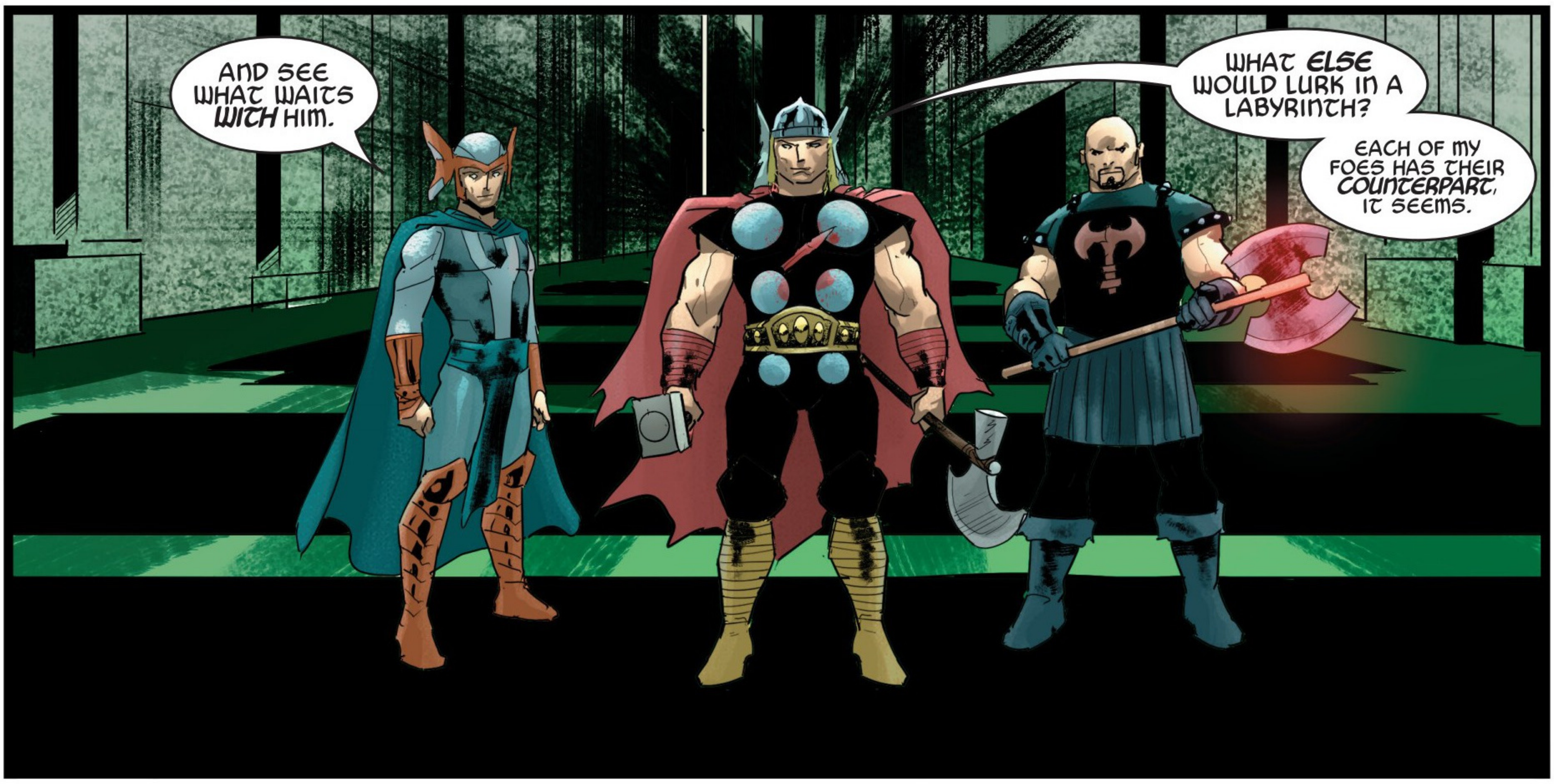
THEN REJOICE!
FOR THE ENEMY IS ON US ONCE AGAIN!
GOOD! THE BLOODAXE HUNGERS, NEVER TO BE SATED--
--UNLESS IT BE WITH MY OWN BLOOD!
SO COME, DWELLERS OF THE ENDLESS CITY!
COME AND TRY TO TAKE IT!
BAH! THIS CITY HAS YET TO TRULY SHOW ITS TEETH!
ARE WE SURE THIS IS THE WAY TO HEIMDALL...?

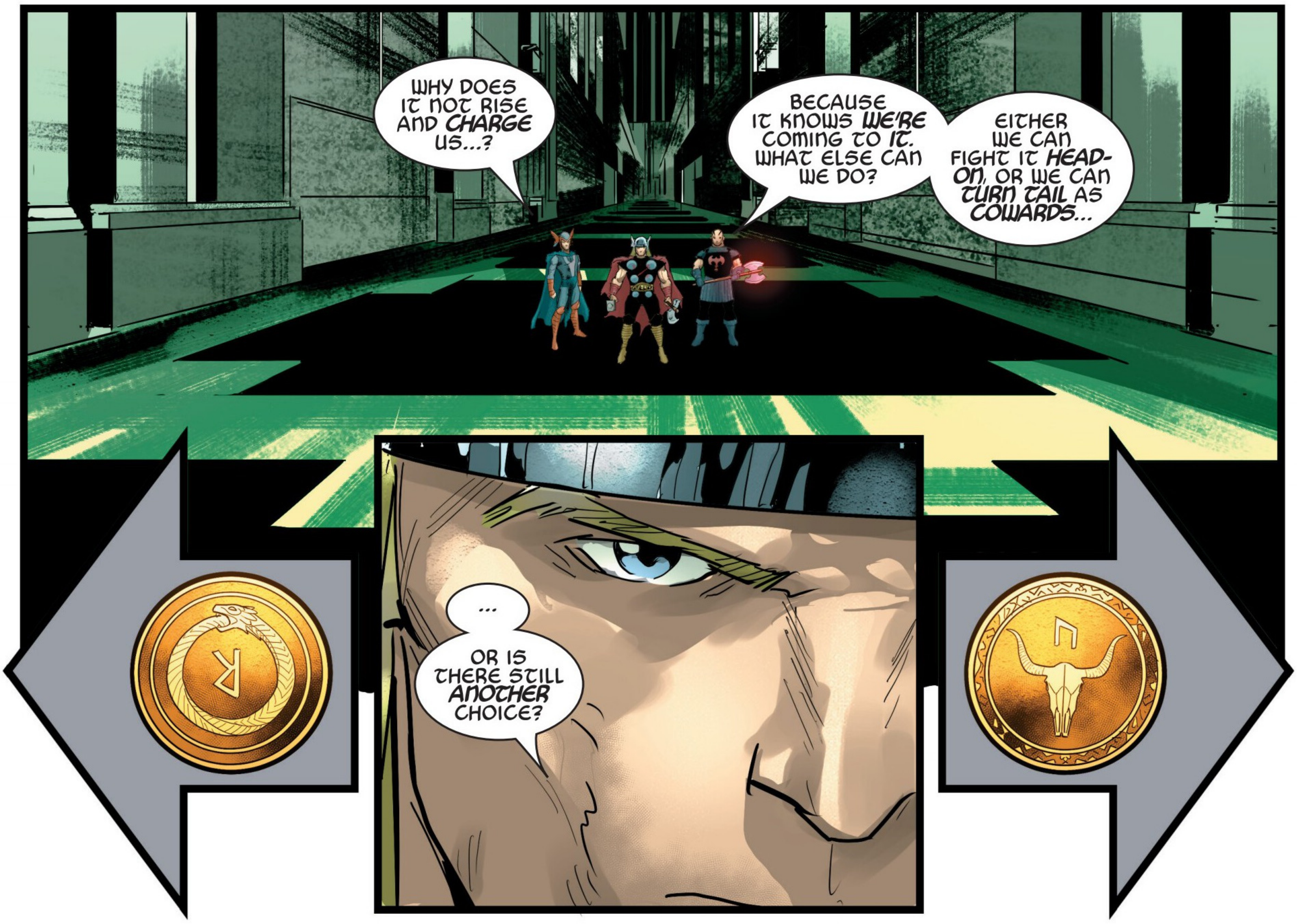
YOU ASK THE QUESTION, SKURGE--BEHOLD THE CITY'S ANSWER!
HA! SO BE IT!
FORWARD, SOLDIERS OF ASGARD!
I ONLY HOPE WE ARE HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION...
KEEP SCOUTING THE WAY AND MAKE SURE OF IT!
THIS CITY TWISTS WITH EVERY STEP--FORWARD OR BACK!
HAVE WE EVEN MOVED FROM WHERE WE BEGAN? THE WAY AHEAD SEEMS A MIRROR OF THE WAY WE CAME!
WE CAN MARK OUR PROGRESS ANOTHER WAY, THOR--
--BY MARKING IT WITH THE ENEMY'S DEAD!

YET THE CITY ITSELF SEEMS UNCHANGING.
HERMOD JOURNEYS FORTH AND RACES BACK, EACH TIME BEARING THE ILLUSION OF PROGRESS...YET WE ARE NO CLOSER THAN WE WERE.
WE ARE GODS, MY LIEGE! HAVE SOME FAITH!
IN WHAT, SKURGE? EVEN THE DEAD YOU PRIZE VANISH THE MOMENT OUR BACKS TURN!
I THOUGHT I WAS READY FOR UTGARD'S TRICKS--YET THE MAGICAL WEAPONS I TOOK SUCH PAINS TO COLLECT ARE ALL BUT USELESS HERE!
DESPITE TORMOD TIGHT IN MY GRIP, WE HAVE NOT THE WISDOM TO AVOID REPEATING OLD ERRORS!
MY BELT OF ENDURANCE ONLY ALLOWS ME TO ENDURE THE SAME CYCLES--AGAIN AND AGAIN!
WE ARE TRAPPED! GODS, MORTALS--ALL OF US!
TRAPPED IN AN ENDLESS MAZE!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO TELL YOU, THOR...
MAYBE THAT'S JUST LIFE IN THE BIG CITY?

THAT'S THE QUESTION, ISN'T IT?
THE CITY--THE COIN--FORCES US TO REPEAT ACTIONS WHOSE CONSEQUENCES WE KNOW FROM BITTER EXPERIENCE.
TO DO THE SAME THINGS, OVER AND OVER, DAY AFTER DAY, IN PURSUIT OF GOALS WE MAY NEVER LIVE TO SEE.
THIS FRUSTRATION, AS HERO-GODS THEMSELVES ARE FRUSTRATED, STYMIED, SENT BACK TO TRY AGAIN. THIS IS NOT WHAT STORIES SHOULD BE, IS IT?
STORIES SHOULD BE DIFFERENT.
SO CALL IT. HEADS OR TAILS. FORWARD OR BACK. EVEN IF THE OUTCOME IS RANDOM...THE CHOICE IS REAL, IS IT NOT?
OR IS IT NOT?


WE HAVE FINALLY GAMBLED AND WON, IT SEEMS.
WE HAVE FOUND HEIMDALL AT LAST--IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MAZE.


AND SEE WHAT WAITS WITH HIM.
WHAT ELSE WOULD LURK IN A LABYRINTH?
EACH OF MY FOES HAS THEIR COUNTERPART, IT SEEMS.


WHY DOES IT NOT RISE AND CHARGE US...?
BECAUSE IT KNOWS WE'RE COMING TO IT. WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?
EITHER WE CAN FIGHT IT HEAD-ON, OR WE CAN TURN TAIL AS COWARDS...
...
OR IS THERE STILL ANOTHER CHOICE?

THE EDGE

21 VARIANT BY **PETE WOODS**

"TO BE LOWER THAN A WORM
IS TO BE HIGHER THAN A KING."

- FROM "THE ATHEIST'S TRAGEDY,"
CYRIL TOURNEUR

The tale began at the **beginning**.
It began in **Primal Time**, when the **Demiurge** gazed upon the **darkness of the deep**...and brought forth the **primal entities**.
The **Elder Gods**.
Not Gods as we count Gods **now**, but greater **far**--for each was an aspect of the Demiurge given **life**, a **primordial concept** given form.
One was **chaos** and **dark power**. One was the **wisdom** of a **long winter**. One was the very joy and horror of **life itself**.
Why would there not be one who was **king**?

Kemur was he called.
Kemur, born with a horned crown upon his skull and thus ordained ruler of all--incarnated as the very concept of rule.
In the time before thrones, he was the throne, and he bellowed to all on the Earth to bow before him.
Those who did not bow, he cut with his blade and gored with his horns. Those who did bow, he trampled with his hooves.
In the great Godwar that consumed the world in that earliest time, he made alliances only to break them, spoke of peace only to spit on it.
He was rule for rule's sake, and none could challenge his rule...
...save for one.
For deep beneath the rock, the new seed had been born.
Atum, son of Gaea, child of the Demiurge itself, had risen from the soil and descended from the sun.
Some call him the first true God--the man of fire that signaled a new era of marvels.
Atum Democide. Atum, slayer of Gods. Atum, breaker of thrones.
Kemur faced him first...
...and time held its breath.

Now time held its breath **again**.
Kemur **stood**, shaking ancient blood and dust from matted fur, and gazed upon the **new** sky-god before him.
Half-brother to the hated **Atum**. The milk-blood of **Gaea** ran in this one's veins--and the ice-blood of **Tiwaz**, the wintry mocker.
Neither had bowed to him, in the time long past. Kemur **remembered** that. Kemur remembered **everything**.
For a moment, Kemur wondered if he could make **this** one bow.
But Thor's gaze held the answer to that.
HERMOD?
No. This one would **not** bow, thought Kemur...

...not until he was made to.
CATCH.
AYE, my LIEGE!
KROOM
HRRNNH--
I HAVE YOU, HEIMDALL!
HERMOD...?
T-TOLD YOU...
RUN...FIND THOR...
SHH. DON'T TALK, MY FRIEND. ONLY LOOK.
THOR IS WITH US.
THE KING IS HERE!
THAP
Thor was gladdened by Hermod's faith in him.
And yet, he was wary...

...for he knew what it was he fought.
THIS BEAST IS NO MERE MONSTER--BUT A GOD FROM BEFORE THE GODS.
AND I HAVE BUT TWO OF THE THREE MAGICAL WEAPONS LOKI SAID I WOULD NEED... AND MY ALLIES ARE FEW...
...LOYAL FRIENDS THOUGH THEY BE.
ONLY GIVE THE ORDER, MY LIEGE!
AND THE EXECUTIONER WILL DIE FIGHTING THY CAUSE!
MAYHAP WE ALL WILL, SKURGE--BUT HOLD BACK FOR NOW.
THAT IS MY COMMAND.
AYE--AND THERE IS THE RUB.
AN ELDER GOD IS A LIVING IDEA--TO GAZE ON HIM IS TO KNOW HIS NATURE. WHO HE IS... AND WHAT.
AND CAN A RULER FIGHT THE EMBODIMENT OF RULE?
CAN A KING BATTLE KINGSHIP...?
Thor hesitated... for only a moment...
...but Kemur saw it.
And Kemur knew.

This would not be like before.
HHRAAAUUUR!
Kemur knew strength was in action.
To think instead of do...to consider the consequences instead of to create and revel in them...
...these things were for the weak. For the small.
AARRGH!
Not for Kings.
Kemur felt the old, dark joy build in the empty cavern of his heart.
He would break the long-hair's back first. Make him crawl. Crawling was not quite as good as bowing...
...but it would do...

...if it could be achieved.
I...SAY THEE...
...NAY!
Mjolnir, greatest of hammers, rang like an uru bell--yet withstood.
And Tormod, symbol of Thor's wit and wile, flew like an arrow--
--for he would hesitate no more.
AAUUURRR!
FIRST BLOOD IS STRUCK! NOW, HERMOD!
WE PRESS THE ATTACK!

The ax in Kemur's flesh **stung**...but what stung **more** was the **noise**...
FOR ASGARD!
...the shrill, sharp noise of these **little things**, of their voices raised so **impudently**.
Did they think they were **alive**, as **Kemur** was alive? Did they think they **mattered**?
It would not **do**.
He would have to put his foot down.

ONE STOMP OF HIS *HOOF*--AND THE EARTH QUAKES LIKE MJOLNIR *ITSELF* HAD STRUCK IT!
HE IS MIGHTY *INDEED*--AND UNBOWED BY ALL OUR ASSAULTS.
HE PAYS NO MORE HEED TO MY *AX* BURIED IN HIS CHEST THAN HE WOULD TO A *RING* THROUGH HIS...
...HMM.
HHNNN!
SKURGE? YOU SEEM *PAINED*...
FORGIVE ME, MY LIEGE.
WHEN BATTLE IS JOINED, THE BLOODAXE *WAKES*...
...AND IT WAKES *HUNGRY.*
THEN TELL THY WEAPON THAT THIS FIGHT IS *FAR FROM OVER,* MY FRIEND.
AND IT WILL *SOON* KNOW THE TIME TO *STRIKE.*
A *POOR* OMEN, IF SKURGE'S *OWN AX* HAS LOST FAITH IN HIM.

AND KEMUR SEEMS UNDETERRED BY MINE.
YET I HAVE A SECOND MAGICAL WEAPON--MY GOLDEN BELT YOLGJÖRD, THAT I CREATED FROM ZEUS' OWN THUNDER TO ANSWER THE RIDDLE OF URUZ.
URUZ...
...REPRESENTING THE AUROCHS.
AUDUMBLA'S CHILDREN, THE WILD CATTLE. PRIMAL BEASTS THAT GAVE MILK AND LIFE--YET RAGED AND RAN AND BROUGHT DEATH IN A STAMPEDE OF HOOVES...
I HEAR LOKI IN MY MEMORY AS IF THEY WERE HERE NOW.
UNLIKE THE AUROCHS, THIS PRIMAL BEAST GIVES NAUGHT BUT WRATH AND HATE...YET IT MUST BE TAMED.
THROUGH THE ODIN-FORCE, I RESHAPED ZEUS' POWER INTO THIS GOLD BELT.
LET ME NOW SHAPE IT AGAIN...
...AND WE SHALL SEE IF WIT MAY ACCOMPLISH...
...WHAT FORCE HAS NOT.

RAAUURRR!
AND IF A SKYFATHER'S MIGHT--AND AN ALL-FATHER'S SKILL--
--CAN TAME AN ELDER GOD!
WHOOOM
Thor took to the air, swift as his own racing thoughts...
...and 'twas then Skurge saw the All-Father's intent.
A GOLD RING...?
I AM NO GREAT PLANNER, HERMOD. BUT I KNOW A PLAN WHEN I SEE ONE...AND HOW TO ADD OUR PART TO IT.
TELL ME--HOW MUCH WEIGHT CAN YOU CARRY?

The godling was not bowing. He was not crawling. He was not doing any of the things he should be.
Kemur felt a sudden and unfamiliar chill--but it was not fear. It was not.
COME, GREAT KING OF UTGARD! SPEAK TO ME AS AN EQUAL--A FELLOW MONARCH!
Fear? Of a little nothing like this? Never. Impossible.
AFTER ALL, I HAVE COME ALL THIS WAY.. TO THY VERY THRONE...
Kemur lunged for Thor--
...WITH A GIFT OF GOLD IN MY HAND!
--and was caught.
And in that moment of humiliation, he felt a new sting in his chest, sharper than any blade...

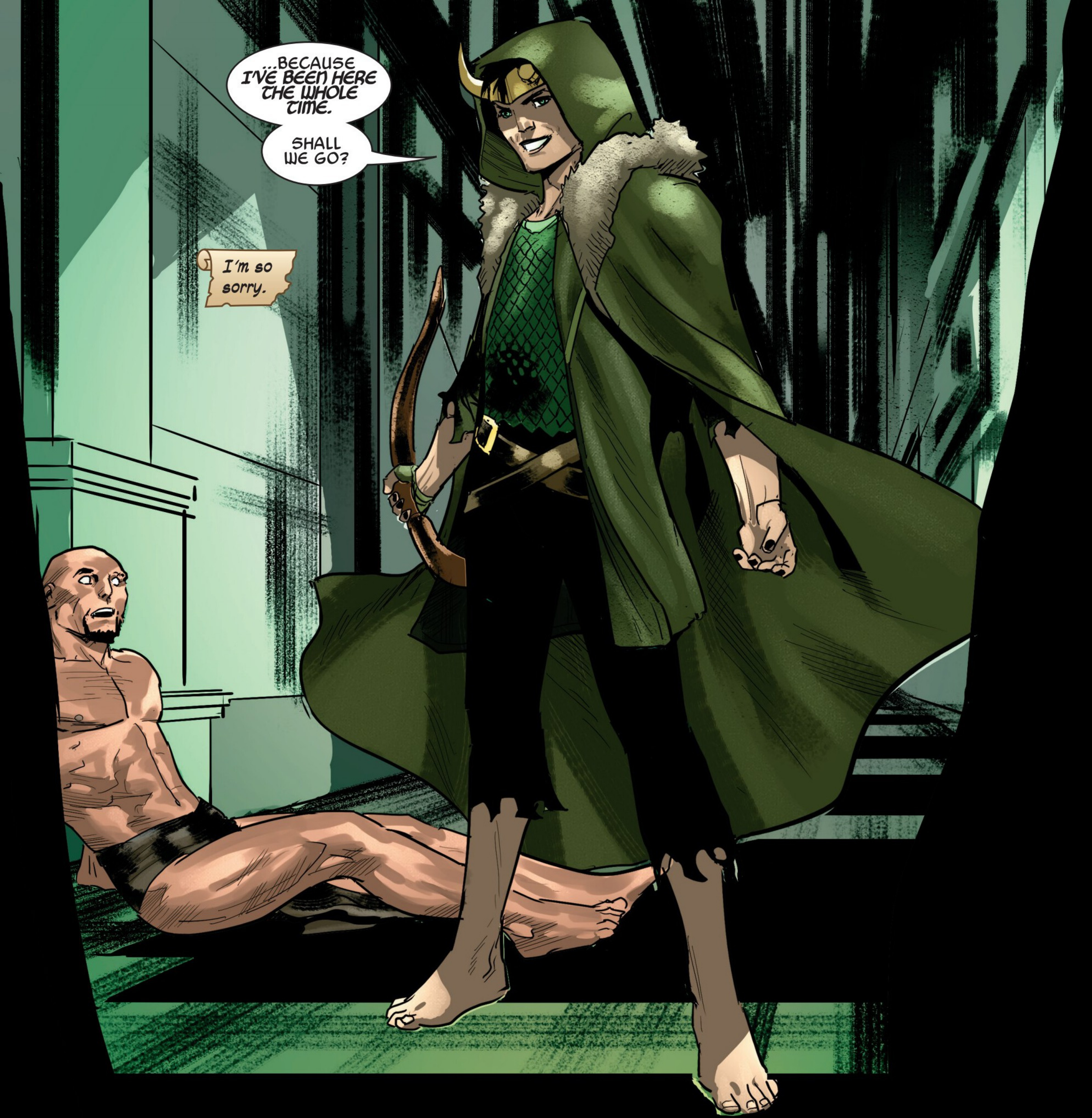
...the sting of **memory.**
Atum descended from the sun. **Atum**, of whom the Earth had warned and the Sky had whispered.
To see him was to **know** him. To know him was to **fear** him. For this was **Godsdeath** born in flesh and fire...
...yet was the **greatest** of the Gods not kingly **Kemur?** Did he not wear the **crown?** Did he not bear the great **sword?**
The Elder Gods drew back from them both. **This** would be the moment, they all knew.
This contest would decide **all their fates.**
Nothing breathed. Nothing twitched.
Atum glowed **brighter.**
Kemur gripped his blade.
His muscles tensed... **readying...**
And as Atum raised a fiery hand...
...**he ran.**
With his sword in hand, **he ran.**
With his horns like knives, **he ran.**
On his trampling hooves, **he ran**...and **hid**...and **cowered.**
And he **prayed**, to **Atum God-killer**...that his dreadful fire might leave **none behind** who knew the **truth** Kemur had etched in stone that day...

RRAAAUURR!
...that all Kings are cowards.
That the strength of any King is a lie--true only to those who would believe it.
THAT IS THE WAY, OLD ONE. RAGE AT THOR, WHO LEADS THEE BY THE NOSE--AND LOOK NOT AT THY FEET!
And if there is one who makes it true? Who lives bravely?
Who faces death for their people? Who values justice for all over power for one?
ON, HERMOD! ON!
I ÷HUFF÷ LIKE THIS PLAN NOT--
Who commands not through fear and inertia...
...but through loyalty and love?
AYE--AND NOR DOES HE!
SHHLUKK
Then that is no King...

...that is a story.
AAAAUUURRR!
AND NOW, BEAST OF AGES--
And for a story to have meaning...for a story to be true...
--YOU WILL FALL!
...it must be able to end.
Understand ye yet, or what?

WHAMM
Kemur's shame burned, as the Gaea-spawn had so long ago.
These nothings had brought him down. Brought him low.
KRK
RRR...
Yet they would learn. Kemur would teach them.
A humiliated King was like a wounded bull.
BRRAAAAUURR!
Most dangerous in its wrath.
RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES.

THUKK
WHUMP
And so, a King's story was *ended*...by the only weapon that could *do* it.
I'm sorry, Thor.
DEAD...
AN IGNOBLE DEATH FOR AN IGNOBLE BEAST. BUT WHAT COULD STRIKE SUCH A *BLOW*...?
A PIECE OF *ETERNITY* THAT FELL INTO MY HANDS.
CENTURIES AGO, IT WAS FORGED INTO A *WEAPON* TO END THE POWER OF *KINGS*.
IT SEEMED A GOOD WAY TO END *THIS* ONE.
...
AS I RECALL, I *BANISHED* YOU FROM MY *SIGHT*. AND I USED THE *ALL-POWER* TO DO IT...
THEN THE ALL-POWER MUST HAVE LITTLE *SWAY* HERE, BROTHER...


...BECAUSE *I'VE BEEN HERE THE WHOLE TIME.*
SHALL WE GO?
I'm so sorry.

COME AT THE KING

“DEATH STANDS ABOVE ME, WHISPERING LOW
I KNOW NOT WHAT INTO MY EAR:
OF HIS STRANGE LANGUAGE ALL I KNOW
IS, THERE IS NOT A WORD OF FEAR.”

– FROM “DEATH UNDREADED,”
WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

Behold the unforgiving city. Behold **NRGL**.
It had dwelled in Utgard since the **primal time**, when the oldest gods made war.
Since that time of exile, it had grown **larger** and **stronger**. It had built itself in **all directions**, out to **infinity**--but always around a **central point**.
The place of **power**. The throne of **Kemur**, god of kings and king of gods.
Theirs was a **symbiotic** relationship. The city had a need for **rule**--the ruler had a need for **territory**. Of all the Utgard-Gods, these two were **closest** in nature.
Now Kemur was **dead**... and NRGL **screamed**.

THE DWELLERS DON'T LIKE THAT WE KILLED THEIR KING, THOR--
--WE HAVE ANOTHER FIGHT ON OUR HANDS!
THE TRIAL OF UTGARD GOES ON, IT SEEMS.
AYE--AND I FEAR FAITHFUL HEIMDALL IS NEAR TO HIS SECOND DEATH!
WE KNOW NOT WHERE HIS SOUL WOULD FLY TO NOW, NOR DO I WISH HIM TO FIND OUT...
...SO WE MUST RETURN HIM SWIFTLY TO THE CARE OF ASGARD!
LOKI!
WAY AHEAD OF YOU, THOR--
SHLUTCH
--THAT WAY!
FOLLOW THE ARROW!

ONCE I RECALL MY AX FROM WITHIN KEMUR'S CHEST--AND MY BELT FROM HIS SNOUT--WE SHALL...
...IF IT IS TRULY SO SIMPLE TO LEAVE THE MAZE THAT NEARLY DESTROYED US AS WE ENTERED.
WHAT IS THAT ARROW MADE FROM...?
THE ETERNITY MASK--A PIECE OF ETERNITY ITSELF, CRAFTED INTO THE BANE OF ALL KINGS.
THAT'S HOW IT SLEW KING KEMUR TO BEGIN WITH! KEEP UP, THOR!
AYE, THAT ANSWERS FOR THE GREAT BULL--BUT NOT FOR THE CITY HE RULED.
THAP
'TIS AS IT WAS WHEN LOKI REBUILT THE RAINBOW BRIDGE.
THEY BLOCK MY QUESTIONS WITH A STORY...
...WHILE THE TRUE ANSWER LURKS BELOW IT--AND SURELY A DARK TRUTH INDEED.
ALL MAGIC HAS A COST. SO WHAT IS THE TRUE COST OF THE MAGIC YOU WIELD NOW, LOKI?
AND WHO WILL PAY IT...?
WHO INDEED, THOR?
WHO INDEED?

THIS WAY! INTO THE MIST!
THE LITTLE SKALD KEEPS TO THE RULES, IN THEIR FASHION.
THROUGH STORY-MAGIC, I BROUGHT THESE SMALL GODS FROM THE FOREST TO THE CITY--AND INTO MY KEEPING.
THUS, BY STORY-MAGIC, THEY MAY RETURN THE SAME WAY.
THOUGH I COULD ALWAYS CHEAT. I AM THE TRICKSTER, AND I AM THE TRICK--IS IT NOT IN MY NATURE TO BREAK RULES?
I COULD HOLD THEM HERE...
IN A FROZEN MOMENT.
THAT LASTS AS LONG AS WE SAY IT DOES.
BUT... NO. THE STORY MOVES ON.
AND IF THERE ARE RULES TO THIS GAME WITH GAEA... THEN LET THERE BE RULES.
LET THE OLDEST RULE APPLY...

...THAT THOR MUST PASS HIS TRIAL.
THE UTGARD-GATE! THE WAY TO THE BLACK BRIDGE--AND BACK TO ASGARD!
HOW DID YOU DO IT, LOKI...?
I HAVE THAT SAME QUESTION, SKURGE--
--BUT NOW IS NOT THE TIME!
DID YOU NOT HEAR THE VOICE OF UTGARD-LOKI JUST NOW...?
YOU HEAR VOICES AGAIN, THOR? THAT IS AN ILL OMEN, MY FRIEND.
THAT IT IS. SO LEND YOUR STRENGTH TO MINE--AND BE SWIFT!
IF WE CAN PULL THE GATE CLOSED AGAIN, WE CAN SEAL THE FORCES OF UTGARD IN THEIR LAND--
FOOLISH ASA-THOR.
YOU ARE NO MASTER-MAGICIAN. YOU CANNOT REWRITE THE GAME AS YOU PLAY IT.
YOU WALKED THROUGH THIS GATE TO FACE YOUR TRIAL...

...AND SUCH A TRIAL IS NOT TO BE ESCAPED, BUT ENDURED.
NOW YOU WOULD PIT THE STRENGTH OF YOUR ARM AGAINST THE DEEP MAGICK IN MY BONES.
FOOLISH, FOOLISH ASA-THOR.
YOU CANNOT SEAL THE GATE...
...IF THERE IS NO GATE.
VRAKOOM

OD'S BLOOD...
Thor, for his part, had nothing left to say.
Utgard-Loki had created the Utgard-Gate--and he had now destroyed it. Such was always his prerogative.
And now the hordes of Utgard would sweep across Asgard... and then Midgard...and then every other realm.
For who would hold them back?
CROSS THE BLACK BRIDGE, HERMOD. CARRY HEIMDALL TO SAFETY.
THE CREATURES OF UTGARD WILL FOLLOW US EVEN TO THE GOLDEN REALM, THOR! THERE IS NO SAFETY!
THERE IS NO GATE--
NOT SO, BROTHER.
FOR I AM THE GATE.
BARROOOMMM

Shame stung Hermod's cheek, then.
A-AYE, MY LIEGE. I WILL HURRY TO RETURN!
AND BRING ALL ASGARD WITH ME WHEN I DO!
AS FOR YOU, LOKI--
And Loki was gone.
Without a word.
OH.
THEN IT IS YOU AND ME, THOR. I WILL STAND WITH THEE TO THE END--
I KNOW. AND IT WOULD BE MY GREATEST HONOR, SKURGE.
BUT WOULD IT BE WISE?
TWO MAY HOLD THE LINE EASIER THAN ONE--BUT WHEN THEY FALL, THEY FALL TOGETHER. THEN WHO IS LEFT...?
OH, FOR--WE HAVE BEEN OVER THIS, THOR! I WILL NOT RUN AWAY TO ASGARD WITHOUT A FIGHT--
I WOULD NEVER ASK YOU TO.
I WILL STAND AT THE GATE, SKURGE.
BUT YOU MUST HOLD THE BRIDGE.

MY LORD...
SHOULD I FALL, YOUR DUTY IS TO DEFEND THE BLACK BRIDGE--OR DESTROY IT.
YOU STOOD ALONE AT GJALLERBRU, SKURGE. WHO ELSE COULD I TRUST?
... GIVE THEM HEL, ALL-FATHER.
NAY-- GIVE THEM ASGARD!
I WILL.
LIVE WELL, GOOD SKURGE. BE HAPPY.
AND ARE YOU HAPPY, THOR? YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU WISHED FOR, AFTER ALL.
YOU CHOSE THIS SACRIFICE-- CHOSE YOUR LONELY VOW OVER STANDING WITH A NOBLE COMRADE.
HERE AT YOUR END, YOU CHOSE TO STAND ALONE...

...SO STAND, GOD OF THUNDER.
STAND AND FIGHT.
The dark forest was forest no more. NRGL, the endless city, had arrived--and so too had Mejed.
Mejed, the hooded one.
God of ghosts and mysteries.
God of the inexplicable.
The smiter...
WHAT...?
WHERE HAS HE--?
...who strikes unseen.
UNNHH!

THOR!
Beyond the Black Bridge--on the other side of Asgard, where the Rainbow Bridge shone--the Lady Sif held her vigil.
Her eyes had inherited her brother Heimdall's sight, and her ears his hearing...and if not prevented by magic, she saw and heard all in the realms...
...and a glimpse of things on the edge of no realm at all.
TO ARMS!
ALL ASGARD, TO ARMS!
Having glimpsed Thor's peril, nothing would prevent her from going to his aid.
WARRIORS, TO YOUR SWORDS! WIZARDS, TO YOUR SPELLS! WE MUST GO NOW--
SIF, WAIT!
THE ALARM IS RAISED, BUT--THERE IS A THING YOU MUST KNOW--
HAVE YOU LOST YOUR SENSES, FANDRAL? THOR NEEDS US! HE NEEDS ME!
WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO KNOW?
Nothing...
...save her own blood.
SIF?

A MIRACLE, MY LADY.
I...I SAW IT, SIF. WHAT LAY BEYOND ALL I HAD SEEN.
I SAW IT.
HEIMDALL.
TREAT HIM GENTLY, SIF. HE HAS SUFFERED GREAT AGONIES TO RETURN TO US IN LIVING FORM.
HE NEEDS A HEALER'S CARE--AS DOES HERMOD.
N-NAY. I PROMISED MY BROTHER, I MUST GO BACK--ACROSS THE VIMUR, ACROSS THE BLACK BRIDGE...
I...I MUST...
...UNNHH...
HE RAN TOO FAST FOR TOO LONG, POOR FELLOW. I'LL WAGER HE'S NOT EATEN SINCE HIS SEEMING END AT TYR'S HAND.
BUT FEAR NOT! MY LEGENDARY HOSPITALITY WILL SEE BOTH IN RUDE HEALTH SOON ENOUGH!
THANK YOU, VOLSTAGG.
THAT WILL BE YOUR TASK, THEN...
...I STILL HAVE MINE.
And as Sif turned her all-seeing eyes toward Thor...

...he saw only the blood in his eyes.
BACK, CREATURES OF THE ENDLESS CITY!
I SAY AGAIN--
--NOT ONE OF YOU WILL TAKE A SINGLE STEP UPON THIS BRIDGE--WHILE THOR BARS THE WAY!
YOU WILL NOT PASS! NOT TO ASGARD, NOT TO MIDGARD, NOT TO ANY REALM TO WHICH THOR BELONGS!
I SWEAR IT ON MY BLOOD--ON THE LAST DROP OF THAT BLOOD!
I SWEAR IT ON MY OWN DEATH!
And with each prophesied moment, the time of that death crept closer.
Deep in his heart, Thor knew it...
...and the Hooded One knew it too.
FOOLISH ASA-THOR.
TO SWEAR UPON A THING SO CHEAP...
...SO EASILY GIVEN!
UNNH!
YOU FACE ALL THE HORDES OF NRGL NOW--AND YOU FACE ME, WHO IS GREATER THAN THEM ALL!
AND YOU SENT YOUR SERVANTS AWAY... TO WAIT ON THE BRIDGE FOR THEIR TURN TO DIE OR TO COWER IN YOUR REALM OF WEAK, SOFT GOLD...
N-NAY.
I SENT MY FRIENDS AWAY.
MY SERVANT IS HERE.

FOR MY **SERVANT** IS THE **GREAT THUNDER** THAT MAKES WARRIORS **TREMBLE IN THEIR HUTS!**
MY **SERVANT** IS THE **TERRIBLE LIGHTNING** THAT **SEARS FLESH TO THE BONE!**
MY **SERVANT**--
--IS THE STORM!
For the Master of Storms was in the final minutes of his life.
And in the face of that end, the **wrath** of the storm was **dreadful to behold.**
The Utgard-Gods **knew** dread, in those last moments.
For the city-dwellers were now **scattered rubble**-- and what is a city without **people?**
What is a **mystery** that can be **caught in the hand?**
L-LET GO OF ME! **LET GO!**
HOODED **MEJED**, WHO IS THE **UNKNOWN**. I HAVE A THING UNKNOWN TO **YOU**, HOODED MEJED.
A LITTLE WHILE AGO, I THREW MY **AX**.
WHERE IS IT NOW?
And a moment later...

...Mejed learned the answer.
Tormod returned to Thor's hand. Tormod, whose edge was keen as Thor's own wit. Tormod, which was his wile and his knowledge.
Tormod--the end of all mysteries.
THAP
And so Mejed died.
And Thor's last stand was over.
...
I LIVE.
DO YOU HEAR? I LIVE!
THOR LIVES!

THE CLEAN AIR AFTER THE STORM IS CRISP AS NEW-FALLEN LEAVES. I NEVER THOUGHT I'D BREATHE SUCH AIR AGAIN.
YET **MEJED** THE **GHOST-GOD** LIES DEAD BEFORE ME. THE **ENDLESS CITY** RETREATS FROM UNDERFOOT. UNTHINKABLE AS IT **SEEMS**...AGAINST ALL **ODDS**, ALL **PROPHECIES**...
...THE DAY IS TRULY **WON**.
YET I DO NOT SEE **UTGARD-LOKI**.
PERHAPS THERE IS A FINAL TRICK YET TO PLAY.
Thor looked around him then...
...yet all he saw, stood in the distance upon the Black Bridge, was loyal **Skurge**, raising the Bloodaxe in celebration of Thor's victory.
And **beyond** him...just now arriving at the very farthest **end** of the bridge, just **barely in his sight**...
...was she who was his love in song and in story.
In that moment, Thor knew **many things**, and knew them with a perfect, crystal **clarity**.
He knew that he had been a **fool**, but foolishness was **over**. He knew who his true love had **always been**.
He knew the time **ahead**--with **her**--would be as boundless as the fields of **childhood** on the very last day of **autumn**.
He knew that **everything** would be **all right now**.

And then he died.

THE DEATH OF THE IMMORTAL THOR

25

"KNOWEST THOU HOW TO PRAY?
KNOWEST THOU HOW TO OFFER?"

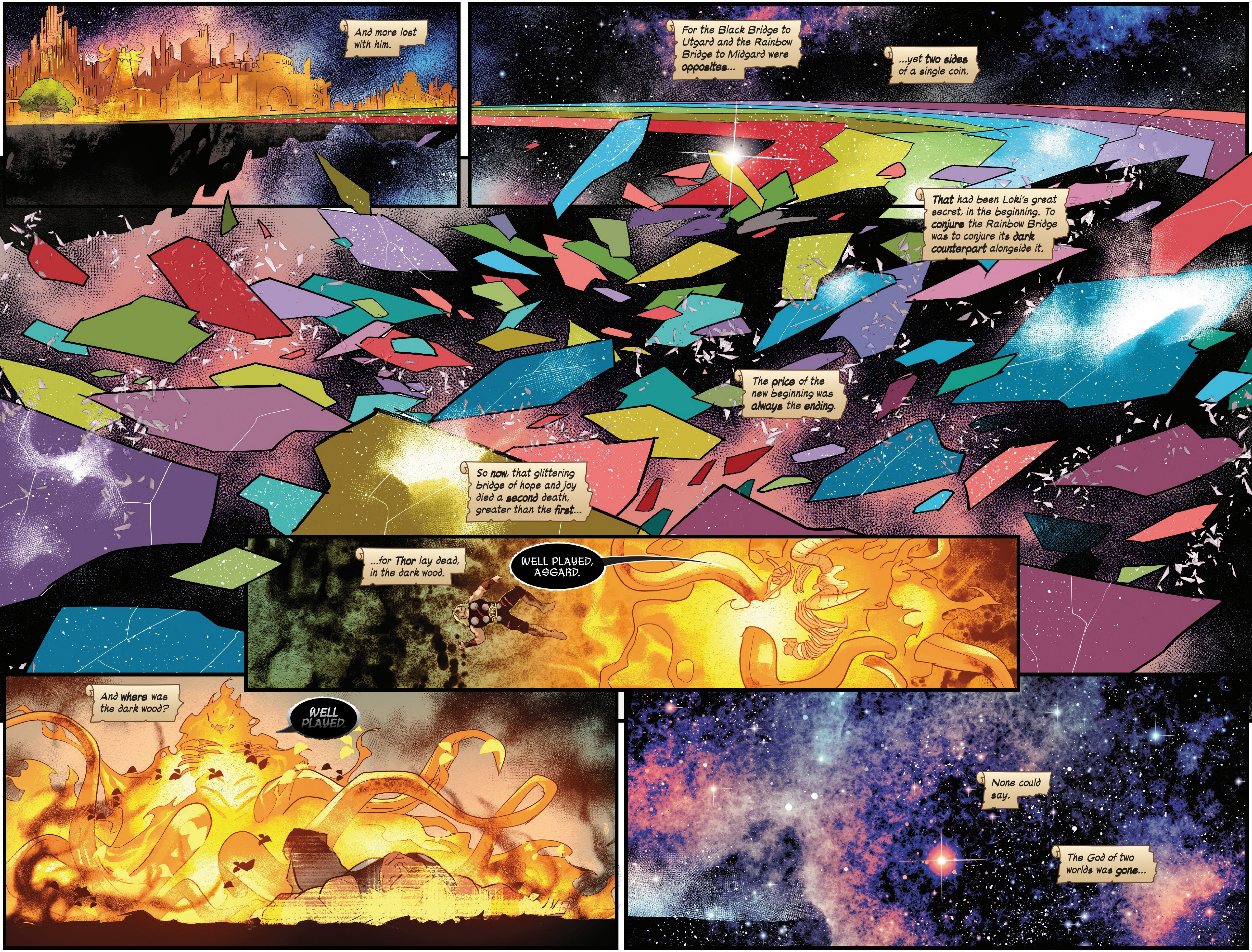
– FROM "ODIN'S RUNE-SONG,"
THE ELDER EDDAS OF
SAEMUND SIGFUSSON

At the end of the Black Bridge that spanned Vimur, greatest of all rivers...by the ruined gate to Utgard, the Realm that was no Realm...
...Thor lay dead.
His weapons fallen and unclaimed. His spirit fled where none could follow.
Slain in his moment of triumph...by base trickery and foul deceit.
Murdered.

Sacrificed.
I'M SORRY, THOR. I'M SO SORRY.
no...
And for **what** was the sacrifice **made?**
LOKI! I WILL SEE YOU **DEAD** FOR THIS!
DEAD AND DAMNED!
What magic would **need** such noble blood as its payment?
What could **ever** be worth this **cost?**
I AM CURIOUS **MYSELF**, LITTLE LOKI. WHAT TRICK ARE YOU **PLAYING** HERE?
ARE YOU A PIECE IN **GAEA'S** GAME? OR IS **SHE** PART OF **YOURS**...?

OH?
WOULD YOU KNOW MORE, OLD TRICKSTER?
MORE WILL BE TOLD.
And Loki was gone.
Utgard-Loki pondered the game as it lay before him. Thor had won his trial--he had endured, while Kemur the King and Mejed the Smiter had fallen.
Yet for all that, the son of Asgard and Midgard was dead...and the way to both those realms was now open.
WHAT AN INTRIGUING TALE YOU WEAVE, ASA-LOKI.
YOU WILL TEMPT ME TO MAKE IT TRUE.
And all that lay in the Elder God's way...
...was Skurge.
The Executioner of Asgard, who Thor had placed halfway across the Black Bridge--to halt the Utgard-Gods by any means he could.
THOR...
And what means would those now be?

MY FRIEND. MY **FOE**.
'TIS A **BITTER** LAST LAUGH YOU HAVE LEFT ME.
Skurge had tried to give his **life** for the All-Father...
...and now, he saw the chance to give it for his **legacy**.
YET STILL, I WILL PLAY **MY** ROLE IN THE JEST!
So he raised the Bloodaxe **high**...
...and **Lady Sif**, guardian of the Rainbow Bridge, saw what he would do.
SKURGE, **NO!**
NO!
Too late.
With one blow of the **ax** that wise Ullr honed with Skurge's **very soul**, the Black Bridge shattered like **glass**...
KRAKKADOOOMMM
...and Skurge **fell**...
HA.
...and was **lost**.


And more lost with him.
For the Black Bridge to Utgard and the Rainbow Bridge to Midgard were **opposites**...
...yet **two sides** of a single coin.
That had been Loki's great secret, in the beginning. To **conjure** the Rainbow Bridge was to conjure its **dark counterpart** alongside it.
The **price** of the new beginning was **always the ending.**
So **now**, that glittering bridge of hope and joy died a **second** death, greater than the **first**...
...for **Thor** lay dead, in the dark wood.
WELL PLAYED, ASGARD.
And **where** was the dark wood?
WELL PLAYED.
None could say.
The God of two worlds was **gone**...

...and all links between Asgard and Midgard were sundered.
NAME THE FACE
OKAY, MARY LOU--YOU ARE ONE QUESTION AWAY FROM THE GRAND PRIZE ON "NAME THE FACE"!
SO...FOR ONE MILLION DOLLARS...CAN YOU NAME THE FIVE PEOPLE IN THIS PICTURE?
OH! TH-THOSE ARE THE ORIGINAL AVENGERS!
I'M SORRY, MARY LOU, I NEED EVERY NAME! WE WILL ACCEPT CODENAMES!
TWENTY SECONDS LEFT!
UH, UH...IRON MAN...THE WASP...UH, BRUCE BANNER...
DID I SAY IRON MAN? NO, ANT-MAN! AND... OH, THE HAMMER GUY...
TEN SECONDS!
BETA RAY BILL!
IT'S BETA RAY BILL, TODD!
THAT'S CORRECT!
THE LAST OF THE FOUNDING AVENGERS WAS INDEED THAT AMAZING ALIEN WARRIOR...BETA RAY BILL!
Even in history.
Even in memory.

I CAN SEE IT. LIKE A WAVE PASSING OVER ALL THE MIDGARD-REALM... A WAVE OF FORGETTING...OF REWRITING THE STORIES...
ONCE AGAIN, WE ARE MYTH TO THEM. STORIES ONLY.
WE WERE NEVER THERE.
DO YOU REMEMBER ME, BILL?
DO YOU REMEMBER ANY OF US?
CONTROL, SIF. YOU ARE SEER OF ASGARD, AND WE NEED THY SIGHT.
ARE THE OTHER REALMS LIKEWISE CUT OFF FROM US?
NAY. WITHOUT THE RAINBOW BRIDGE, THE WAYS ARE LONGER-- BUT THERE ARE WAYS. IT IS ONLY MIDGARD THAT IS SEPARATE FROM US ENTIRELY.
SO WE ARE NINE REALMS AGAIN.
AND PERHAPS BETWEEN THE NINE OF US, WE MAY FIND A WAY TO THE LOST TENTH...
...AFTER WE MOURN.
Fandral spoke gently-- and spoke of hope, for that was his way. But his secret heart was as dark and grim as Hogun's.
There would be little hope for Asgard...or any realm...in the time to come.
How could there be?
Thor was dead.

And so, Thor entered into death.
THE TWILIGHT KINGDOM

LOKI TOLD THE TRUTH, THEN.
THEY LOOKED INTO MY EYES ACROSS A FLAME OF GREAT MAGIC AND SWORE THEY WOULD KILL ME...
...AND HERE I AM DEAD.
AND NOT FOR ME VALHALLA, WHERE MY FATHER NOW RESIDES--NOR ANDLANG, SPIRIT-REALM OF GREAT-GRANDFATHER BURI.
NOR IS THIS EVEN CHEERLESS HEL, FOR ALL THE TIMES HELA SWORE I WOULD END MY DAYS THERE.
I STAND FOR A THIRD TIME IN THE THIRD HEAVEN--VIDBLAINN, LAND OF LOST SOULS.
WHY, LOKI?
WHY HERE...?
HSSSS!

HHRRAKK!
SO! IT SEEMS THE DEMONS OF VIDBLAINN ARE HERE TO GREET ME!
COME THEN, FOUL CUR! YOU WILL NOT FIND THOR AN EASY--
--WHAT...?
RRKK!
CHRAKK!
AN INSECT AT MY FEET IS WHAT DREW ITS EYE. A MORSEL OF FOOD FOR A HUNGRY BEAST.
IT WANTED NO FIGHT AT ALL...AND WHY WOULD IT?
BEFORE, THESE DEMONS FOUGHT TO KEEP ME FROM RETURNING TO LIFE...

...NOW I HAVE NO LIFE TO RETURN TO.
I STRETCH OUT MY HAND AS I HAVE SO MANY TIMES... BUT MJOLNIR DOES NOT FILL IT.
AND THOUGH THERE IS RAIN HERE, IT IS WEAK AND FORMLESS.
THE STORM WILL NOT COME TO THIS PLACE.
SO WHERE VOYAGE YOU NOW, THOR ODINSON?
WHAT SKY ARE YOU FOUND UNDER? WHAT STAR DO YOU NOW ORBIT?
ARE YOU REMEMBERED BY THOSE YOU ONCE AIDED? DO THE TRIUMPHS YOU FOUGHT FOR YET SURVIVE? DOES THE GOOD YOU DIED FOR MEAN ANYTHING AT ALL?
FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS YOUR DEATH? FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS YOUR LIFE?
TELL ME, EMPTINESS! TELL ME, DEATH!
NOW THAT IT IS TOO LATE--NOW THAT IT IS OVER--
--THE ALL-FATHER WOULD KNOW!

NAY.
THE ALL-FATHER IS DEAD...AND POMP AND PRIDE DIED WITH HIM.
I WOULD KNOW.
WOULD YOU KNOW MORE?

WHO ARE YOU...?
HAR AM I, WHO SITS ON THE HIGH THRONE OF THE THIRD LAND OF DEATH AND SPEAKS HIGH TRUTHS.
AND YOU ARE THOR-- WHO BOWS AT LAST TO WHAT MUST BE.
JAFNHAR AM I, EQUAL TO MY BROTHERS. I SIT ON THE HIGHER THRONE AND SPEAK HIGHER TRUTHS YET.
AND YOU ARE THOR-- WHOSE THREAD IS CUT, WHOSE FINAL END FACED.
THRIDI AM I, THIRD OF BROTHERS. I SIT ON THE HIGHEST THRONE AND SPEAK THE HIGHEST TRUTHS OF ALL.
AND YOU ARE THOR--WHO SEEKS ANSWERS, AS HIS FATHER DID BEFORE HIM IN THE LONG-AGO.
IF YOU WOULD KNOW MORE... MORE WILL BE TOLD.

WHAT KNOW **YOU** OF MY FATHER...?
FIRST, I KNOW THAT KING ODIN **DIED,** AND IN VALHALLA KING ODIN MUST **REMAIN.**
SECOND, I KNOW THAT ODIN ONE-EYE IS **GREATER** THAN A KING.
THIRD, I KNOW THAT A **SEEKER OF KNOWLEDGE** WILL ALWAYS SEEK IT **MORE.**
AYE, I LIKE THAT ANSWER.
WHAT OF MY SON, **MAGNI?** WHAT FATE AWAITS **HIM?**
FOURTH, I KNOW THAT TWO PATHS **DIVERGE**--ONE LONG, ONE **TRAGIC SHORT.**
FIFTH, I KNOW TO BEWARE **AMBITION** IN TWO FORMS.
SIXTH, I KNOW THAT WHERE I SEE A **THRONE,** I SEE A **GRAVE.**
I LIKE **THAT** ANSWER **NOT.**
AND WHAT IS **MY** FATE NOW, THIRD OF THREE? WHAT IS **MY** PATH, HERE AT THE END OF ALL TALES?
SEVENTH, I KNOW THAT YOU WALK THE PATH OF **SACRIFICE,** AS ODIN DID BEFORE.
EIGHTH, I KNOW THAT YOU SACRIFICE **YOURSELF TO YOURSELF,** AS ODIN DID BEFORE.
AND **NINTH,** I KNOW THAT YOU MUST WALK WHERE ODIN COULD **NOT** BEFORE--ON A PATH **NOT YET TAKEN.**

AND YOU WILL NOT WALK IT ALONE.
WHO SITS IN THY SHADOW, THOR?
DONALD BLAKE.
MY OTHER SELF.
I TOLD YOU THE LAST TIME WE WERE BOTH IN VIDBLÄINN, THOR...
...WE'RE CONNECTED. I CAN FIND YOU HERE--MY SOUL CAN, AT LEAST. I DO HAVE ONE, YOU KNOW.
THE SPARK OF HUMANITY ODIN CREATED--AS CAMOUFLAGE. A SHELL, TO HIDE THE SON HE LOVED BEST...
I SEE WE MUST ARGUE THIS AGAIN, AT THE END. AND PERHAPS WE SHOULD.
DESPITE YOUR DARK DEEDS, I OWE YOU AN ACCOUNTING. ODIN DID YOU WRONG--BUT I DID YOU LITTLE BETTER.
WHEN LAST WE MET, YOU ASKED IF I KNEW WHAT LOKI DID TO YOU, WHEN I GAVE YOU TO MY SIBLING FOR PUNISHMENT. IF I KNEW WHERE YOU WERE NOW.
I WAS TOO BUSY TO ANSWER YOU...BUT THE CLUE WAS IN THY EYES, BURNED AWAY BY SNAKE VENOM.
THE SKALD PLACED YOU IN THE PUNISHMENT THEY ONCE SUFFERED, DID THEY NOT?
YOU WISHED TO BECOME A GOD...AND NOW YOU ARE.
THE GOD OF LIES.

IT'S CLEVER, I SUPPOSE.
ODIN'S EVIL CHILD, WHO HE NEVER SIRED. YOUR EVIL BROTHER, WHO'S NO RELATION. THE GOD OF LIES, FOREVER YOUR OPPONENT.
EVERYTHING LOKI NO LONGER WANTS IS CHAINED TO ME...THANKS TO YOU.
AYE. BY MY ACTIONS I CREATED YOU--AS MUCH AS MY FATHER EVER DID.
SOME WOULD SAY THAT DONALD BLAKE WAS THOR'S GREATEST SIN...
IS THAT ALL?
WHAT?
IS THAT ALL I AM? YOUR SIN?
AM I WORTH SO LITTLE YOU CANNOT SEE ME OUTSIDE YOURSELF...?
BLAKE... DONALD...
I SPOKE POORLY, AND I AM SORRY FOR THAT. I AM SORRY FOR ALL I DID--AND ALL I SHOULD HAVE DONE.
BUT CAN THIS VAST BITTERNESS NOT REST IN YOU, EVEN AFTER I AM DEAD?
WELL... THAT'S THE POINT, THOR.
YOU COULD BE SO MUCH DEADER.

WHAMMM
YOU SAY YOU OWE ME AN *ACCOUNTING!* YOU SAY YOU'RE *SORRY!*
AS IF YOU HAVE THE *SMALLEST UNDERSTANDING* OF WHAT YOU'RE EVEN SORRY *FOR!*
WHAT DO *YOU* KNOW, THUNDER GOD? WHAT *CAN* YOU KNOW?
HAVE YOU EVER SUFFERED?
KRAKOOMMM
HNNGGH!

I...I *KNOW* THAT WEAPON...
YOU'VE FELT IT *BEFORE*, THOR. *HELLNIR*, THE *DEVIL'S HAMMER*, FORGED FROM *PROMETHIUM AND HATE*...
...AND THROUGH MY POWER MADE A *TRUE* REFLECTION OF MJOLNIR. *TWINNED* WITH IT THROUGH TIME AND SPACE, A *DARK OPPOSITE*...
...WITH ITS OWN DARK *LIGHTNING*.
SHRZZAKKK
HNNNH!
THIS STORM ISN'T YOUR SERVANT--OR YOUR *FRIEND*. DOES IT *HURT?* DOES IT FEEL LIKE *POISON IN YOUR VEINS?*
GOOD. IT *SHOULD*.
I AM *GOD OF LIES*, "BROTHER"--
--AND *YOUR PAIN* IS THE BIGGEST *LIE* THERE EVER WAS.
FOR WHAT CAN A GOD *EVER* KNOW OF *PAIN*...?
BLAKE, THIS...THIS IS *MADNESS* THAT SPEAKS!

MADNESS, THOR--
WHOKK
--IS THINKING YOU CAN LEARN HUMILITY FROM A *DISTANCE!*
KROOMM
BELIEVING YOU CAN LEARN *HUMANITY* WHILE TAKING *LITTLE BREAKS FOR GODHOOD!*
IMAGINING THAT YOU CAN *DIE*--SUDDENLY, *INEVITABLY*, IN *PAIN*, IN *LOVE*, IN THE *MIDDLE* OF THINGS--
--DIE AS HUMANS *MUST* DIE--
--AND STILL!
BE!
HERE!
WHAMMM
THIS ISN'T MADNESS. THIS IS *CORRECTING* ODIN'S *MISTAKE*.
BECAUSE ARROGANCE WITH A *SMILE* IS STILL *ARROGANCE*. BECAUSE A *KINDLY* KING IS STILL A *KING*.
BECAUSE *SOME* LESSONS YOU CAN ONLY LEARN...

...THROUGH SACRIFICE.
SHRRZAKKK
AAARRGGHH!
my...my EYES...!
A GOOD BEGINNING.
BUT I HAVE MUCH MORE TO TEACH YOU. YOU KNOW ONLY WHERE I WAS, THOR.
DO YOU KNOW WHERE I AM NOW?
KRAK
PERHAPS I'LL TELL YOU, AS YOU BLEED.
A FINAL PIECE OF WISDOM FOR YOU TO CARRY INTO OBLIVION...
NO, BLAKE.
THERE IS NO WISDOM ON THIS ROAD--

THAP
--FOR IT IS A ROAD ALREADY TAKEN.
I GAVE MY EYES ONCE FOR WISDOM, BLAKE. I TORE THEM FROM MY HEAD, HURLED THEM INTO MIMIR'S WELL AND DIED ON THE WORLD TREE.
THUS I LEARNED THE RUNES. THUS I LEARNED THE POWER AND MAGIC OF MY BIRTHRIGHT.
LET GO!
THIS IS MY HAMMER, THOR!
YET TWINNED TO MINE, AS YOU SAID.
NOW YOU SAY I MUST LEARN SOMETHING MORE VAST AND MORE STRANGE THAN EVEN THE RUNES. SOMETHING MORE TERRIBLE THAN DEATH.
AND WITH NO EYES, I SEE--
--THAT THE GOD OF LIES SPEAKS TRUE!

YOU SAY I AM TOO MUCH THE IMMORTAL, AS YOU YOURSELF EMBRACE THE ROLE LOKI SET FOR YOU--
--AS I NOW SEE THE SPELL LOKI WOVE AROUND ME.
FOR IF WE ARE BOTH GODS AND NEITHER MORTAL... THEN BETWEEN THE TWO OF US...
NO!
...THERE IS A HUMAN SOUL THAT GOES SPARE.
A HUMAN LIFE.
LET THERE BE A NEW SACRIFICE, THEN! A SACRIFICE OF ALL POWER AND PRIDE! OF MYSELF TO MYSELF! A SACRIFICE BEYOND MERE DEATH!
LET THE WINTER OF GODS COME--
NO!
--AND LET IT COME NOW!
KRAKA-

DOOOOMMM
THOR...
I DON'T...
I DON'T FEEL IT, THOR!
WHAT DID YOU DO WITH IT? WHAT DID YOU DO?
WHAT DID YOU DO WITH MY SOUL?
The great Serpent--who wore the name of Donald Blake but could never be that again--screamed, then, to the ends of Vidbláinn...

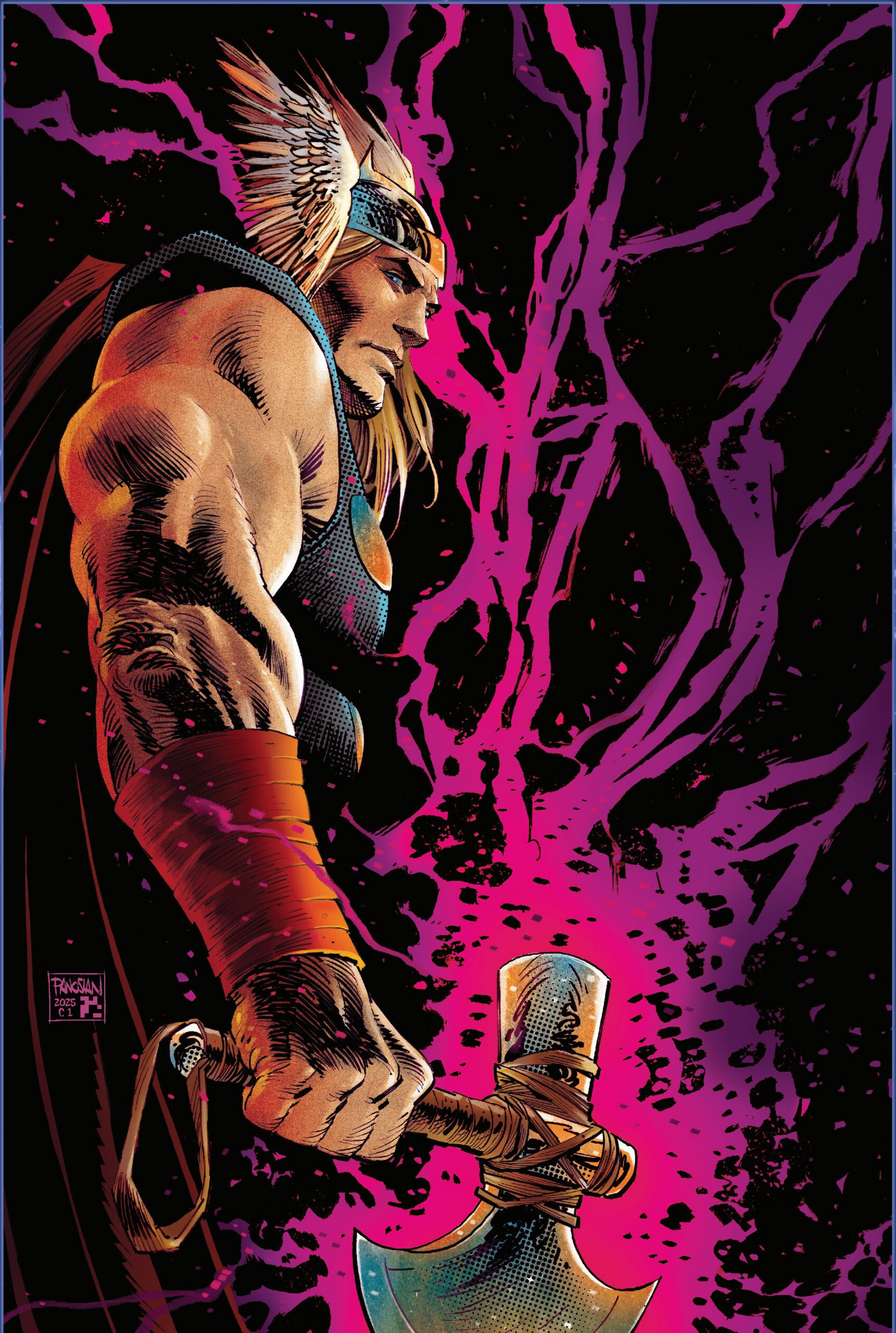
...yet there was no god left to answer him.
And though he gazed to **the end of Eternity**, there was no star to **guide** him...no bird to show him a **sign**...
...naught but **stillness and silence.**
Thor was **gone.**

For a while, at least.
OPEN YOUR EYES.

OPEN YOUR EYES!

THERE YOU ARE. GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK WITH US.
I *THINK* YOU WERE JUST IN A *FIGHT*.
WHO...?
ME?
CALL ME... *LUKKI*.
LUCKY...?
LUCKY. WHY NOT?
AND *YOU'RE* LUCKY I WAS HERE TO *FIND* YOU. YOU COULD'VE GOT *REALLY* LOST.
AS IT *IS*...
...*HERE*. A WALLET WITH A FEW DOLLARS AND...AN *APARTMENT KEY*, I THINK? YOU MUST HAVE *DROPPED* THEM.
NO *I.D.*, THOUGH. YOU'LL HAVE TO REMEMBER YOUR *OWN* NAME.
SO *THINK HARD*. WHAT'S COMING *BACK?* WHO *ARE* YOU?
ANYBODY INTERESTING? ANYBODY *SPECIAL?*
MY...MY NAME...
...IS *SIGURD*.
SIGURD *JARLSON*.

AND I AM JUST A MAN.
NEXT: THE MORTAL THOR.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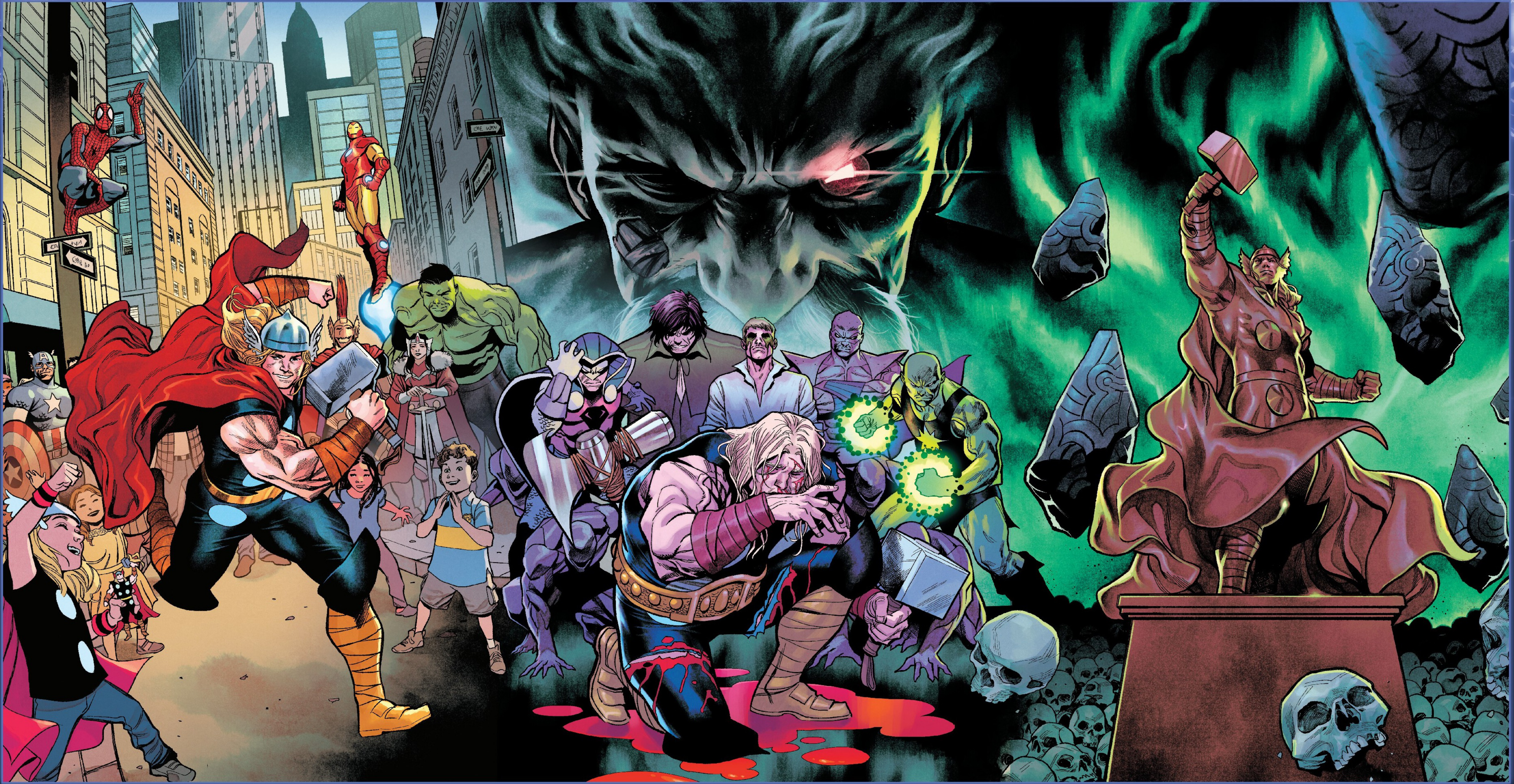

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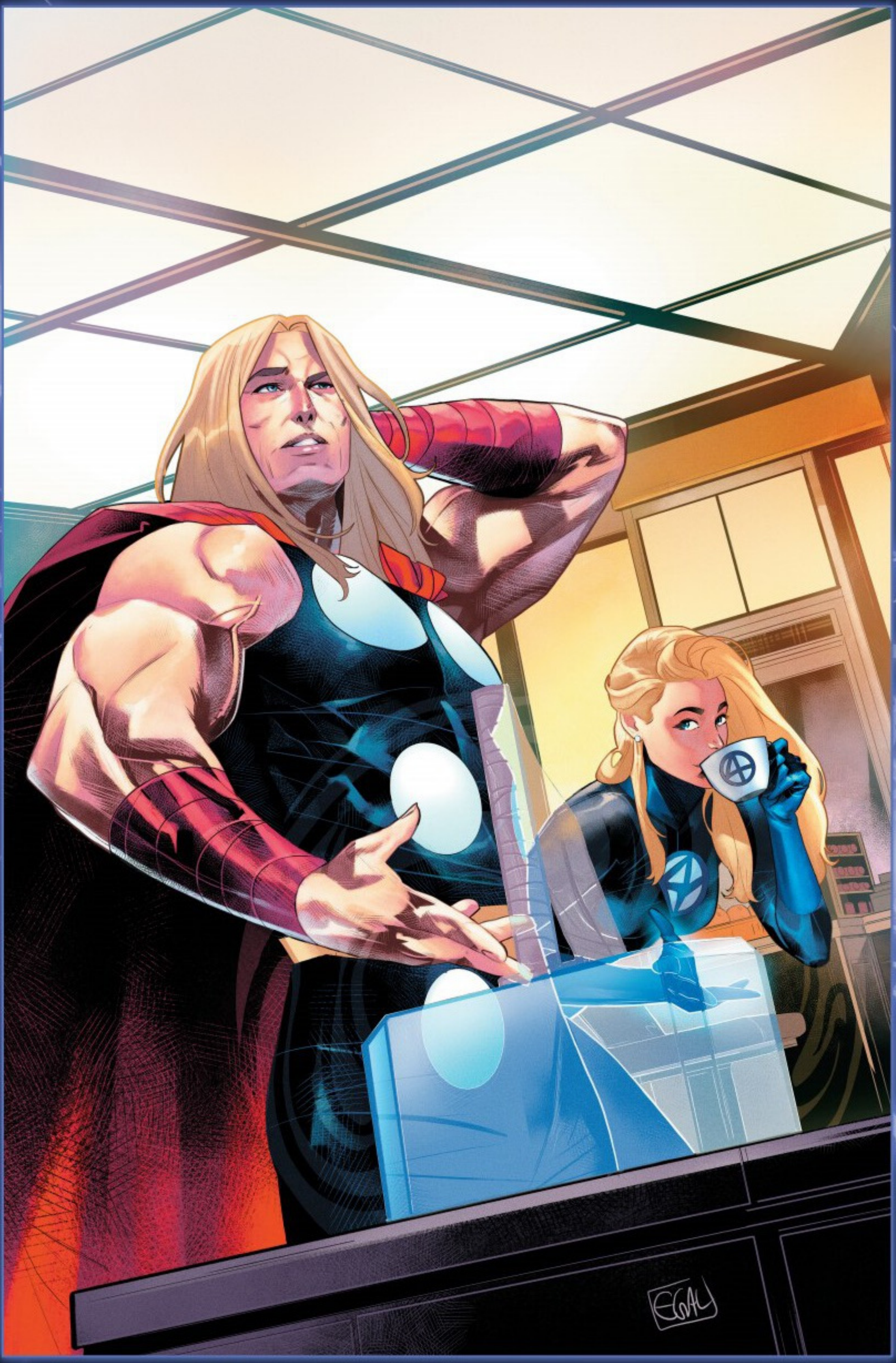

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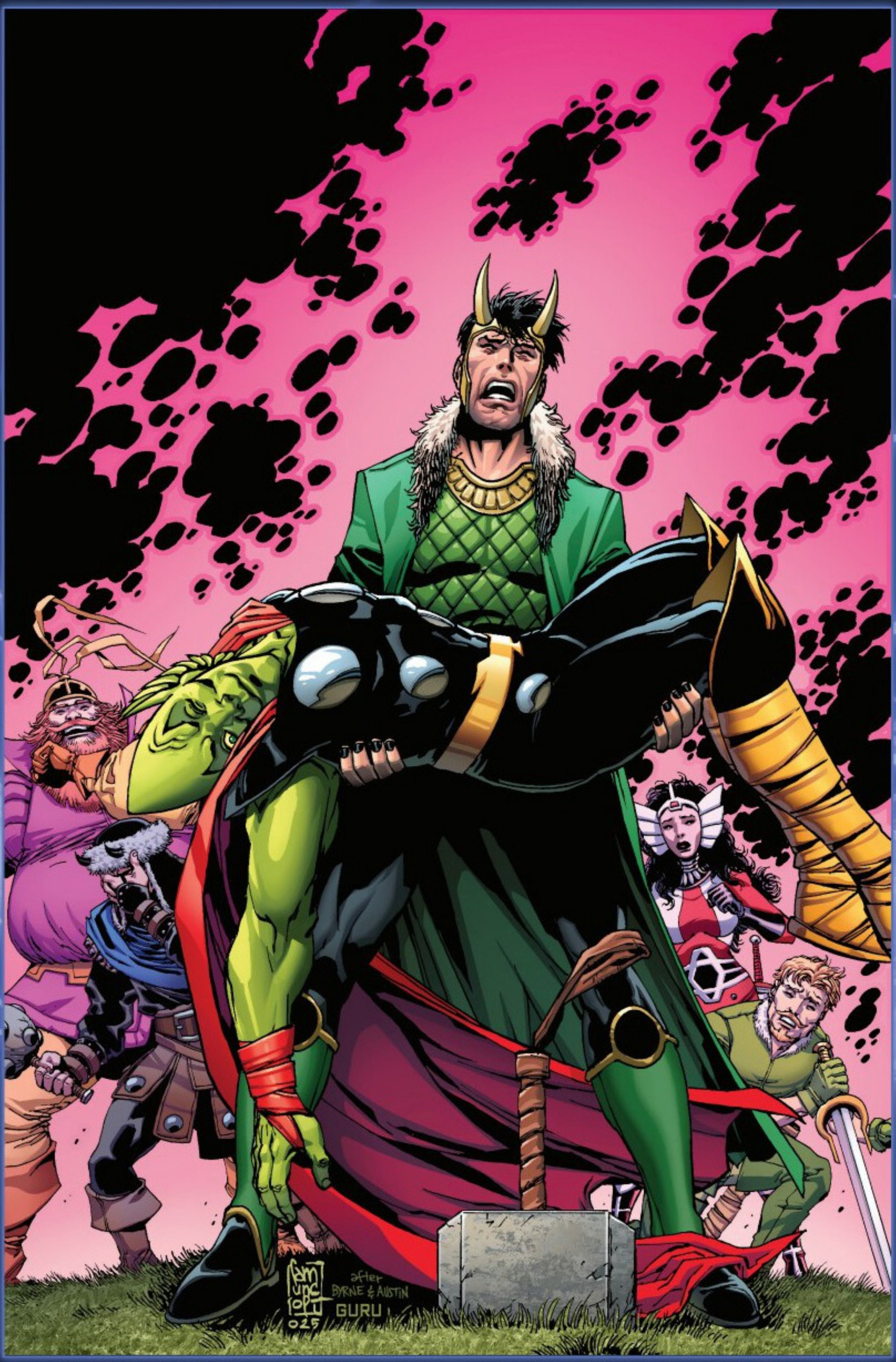

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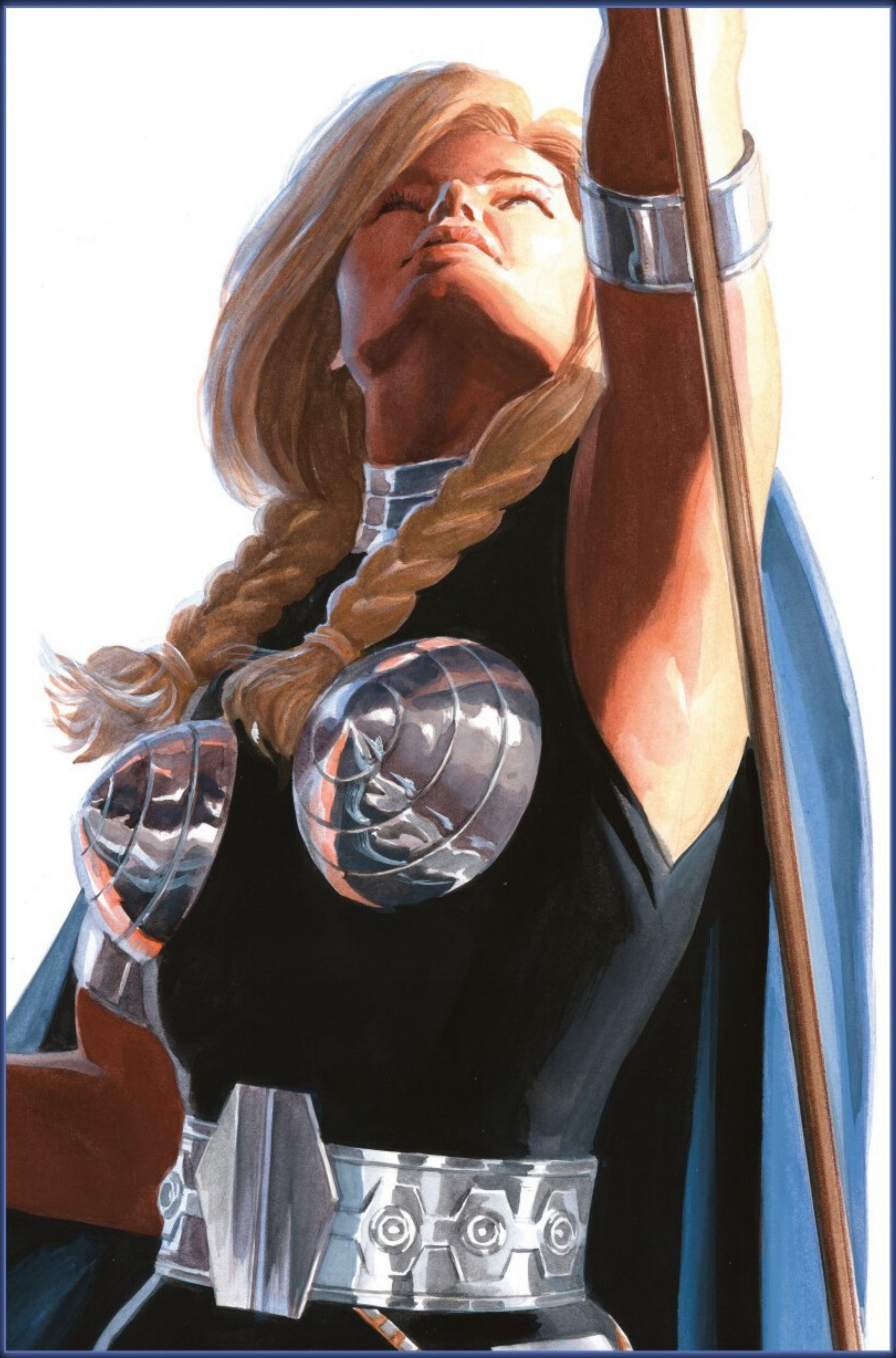

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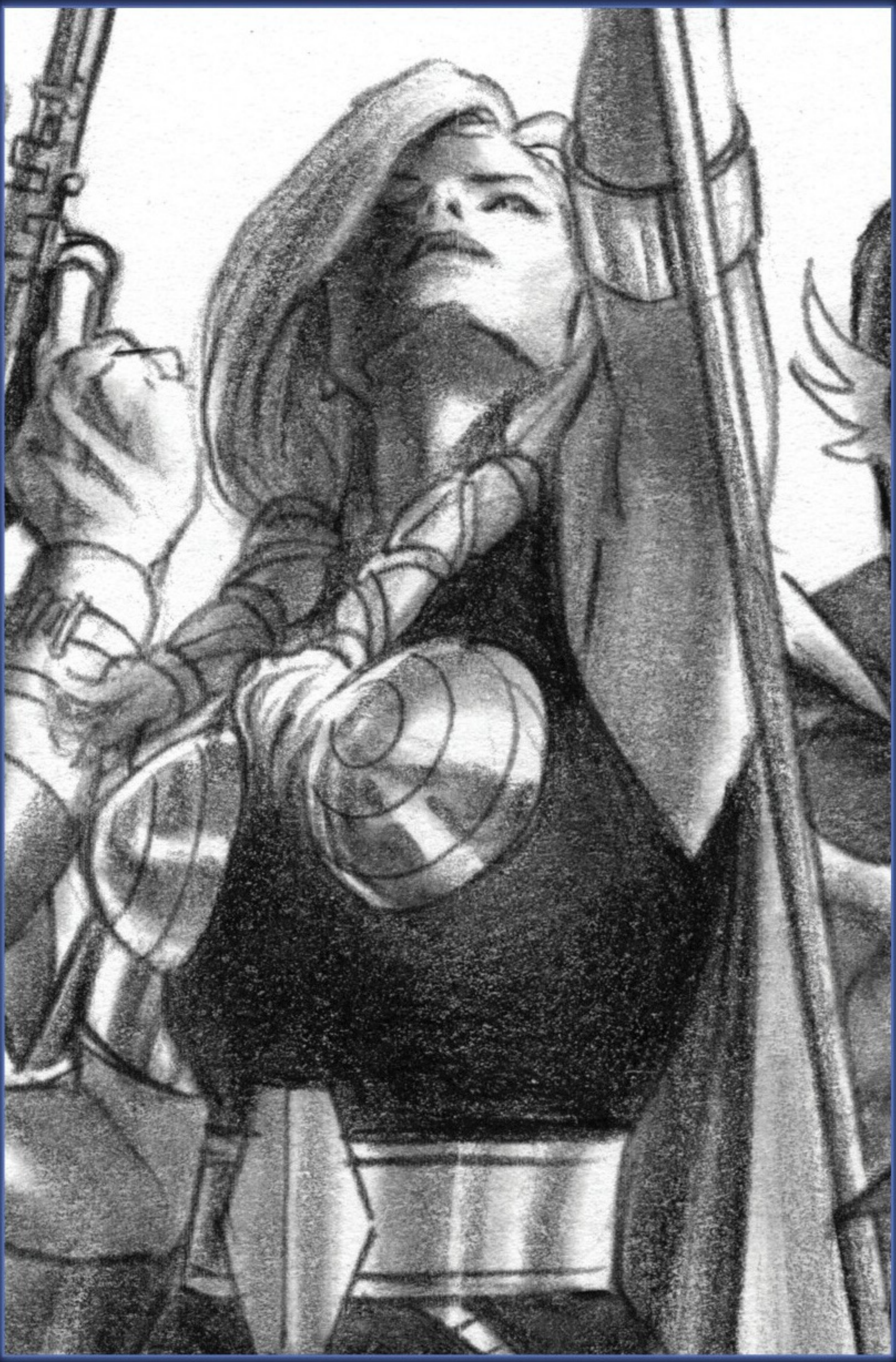

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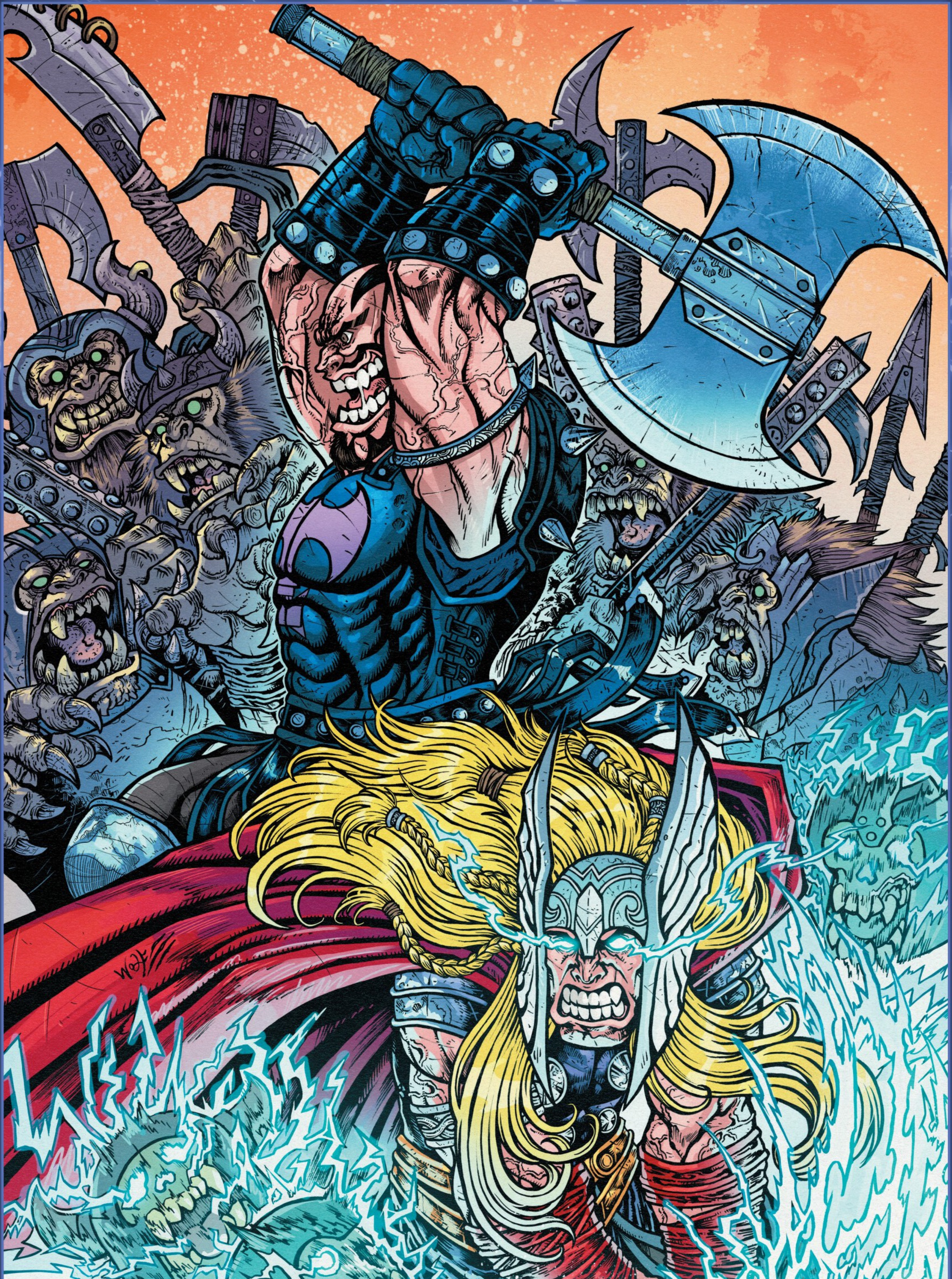

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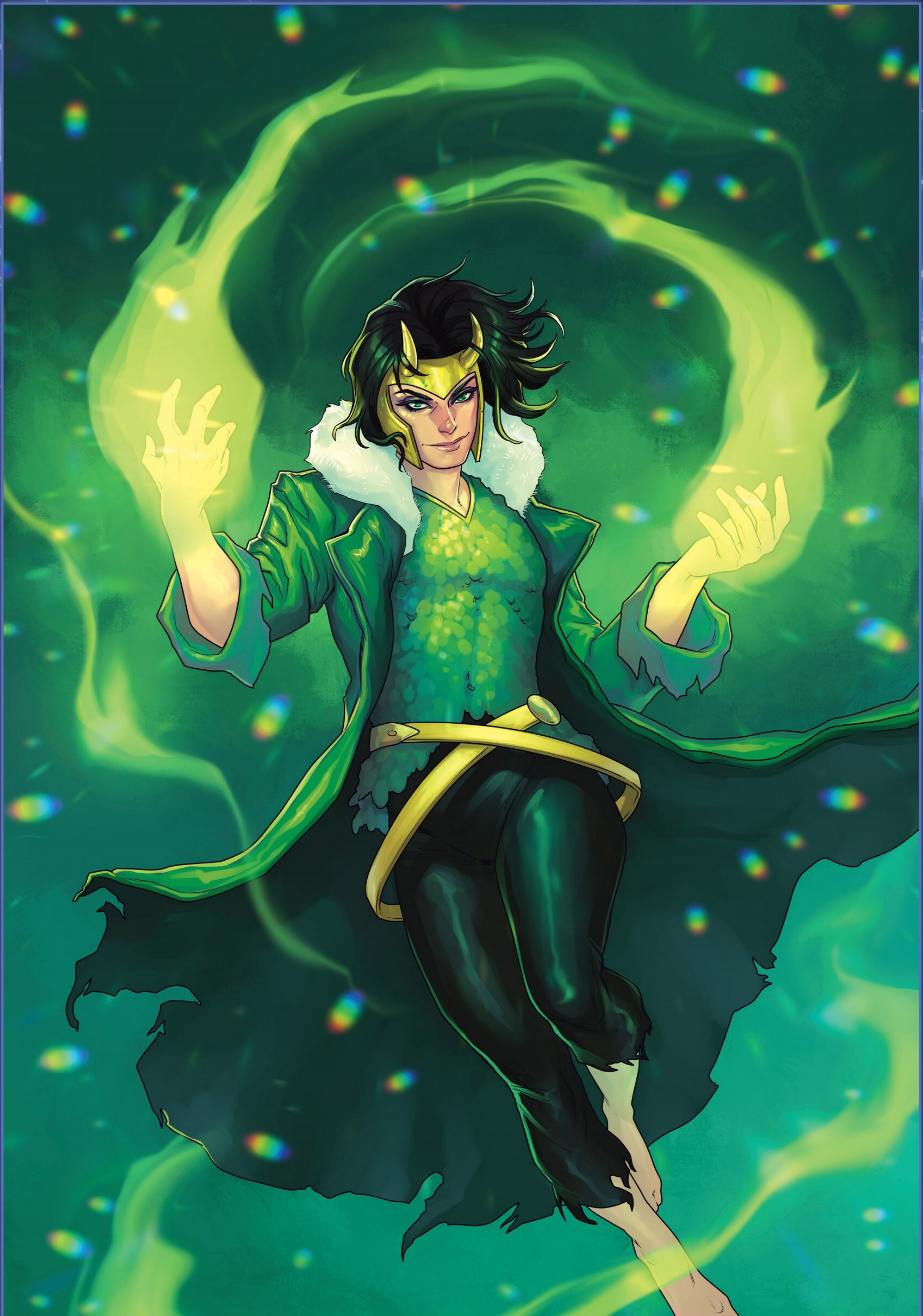

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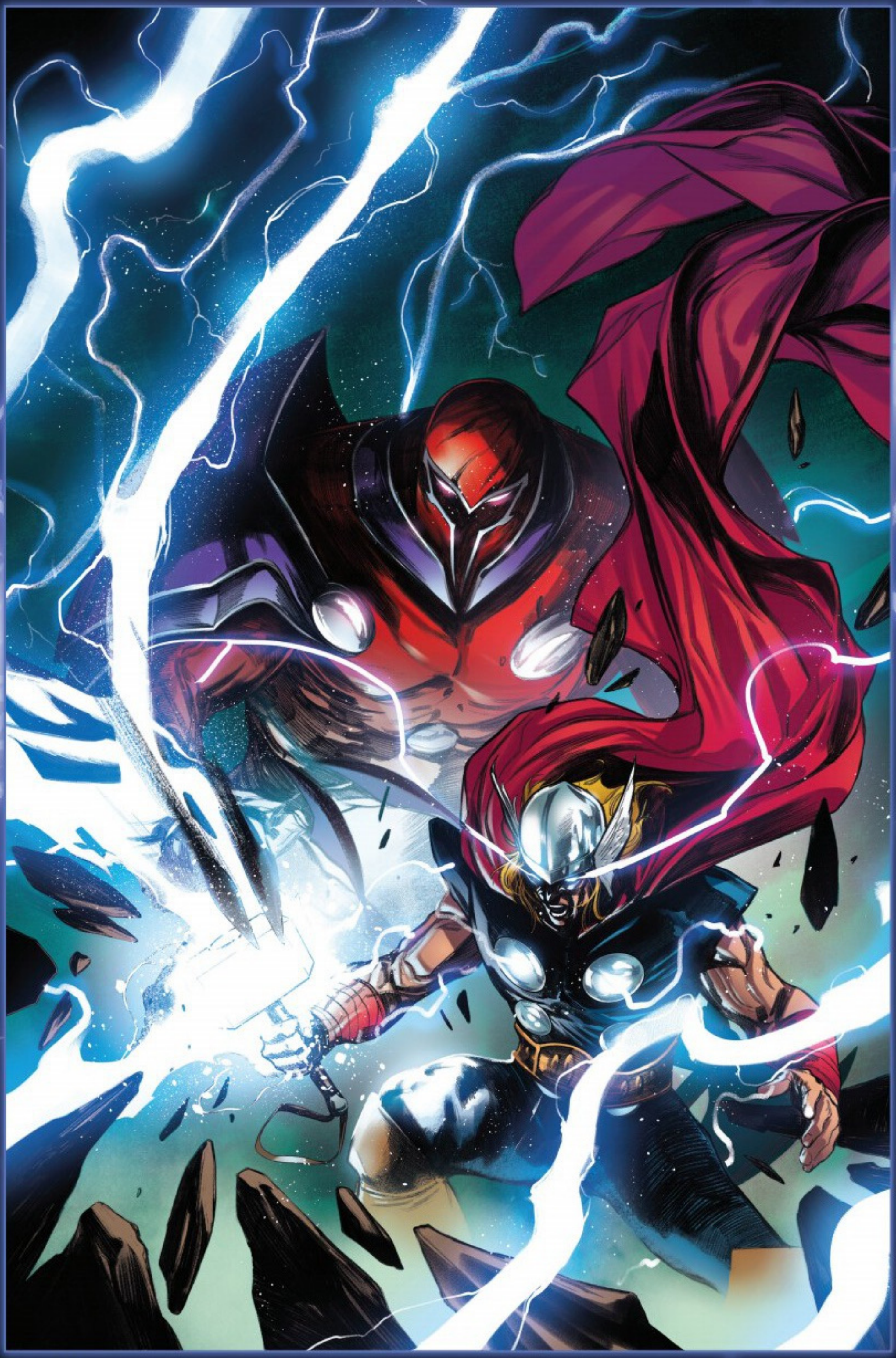

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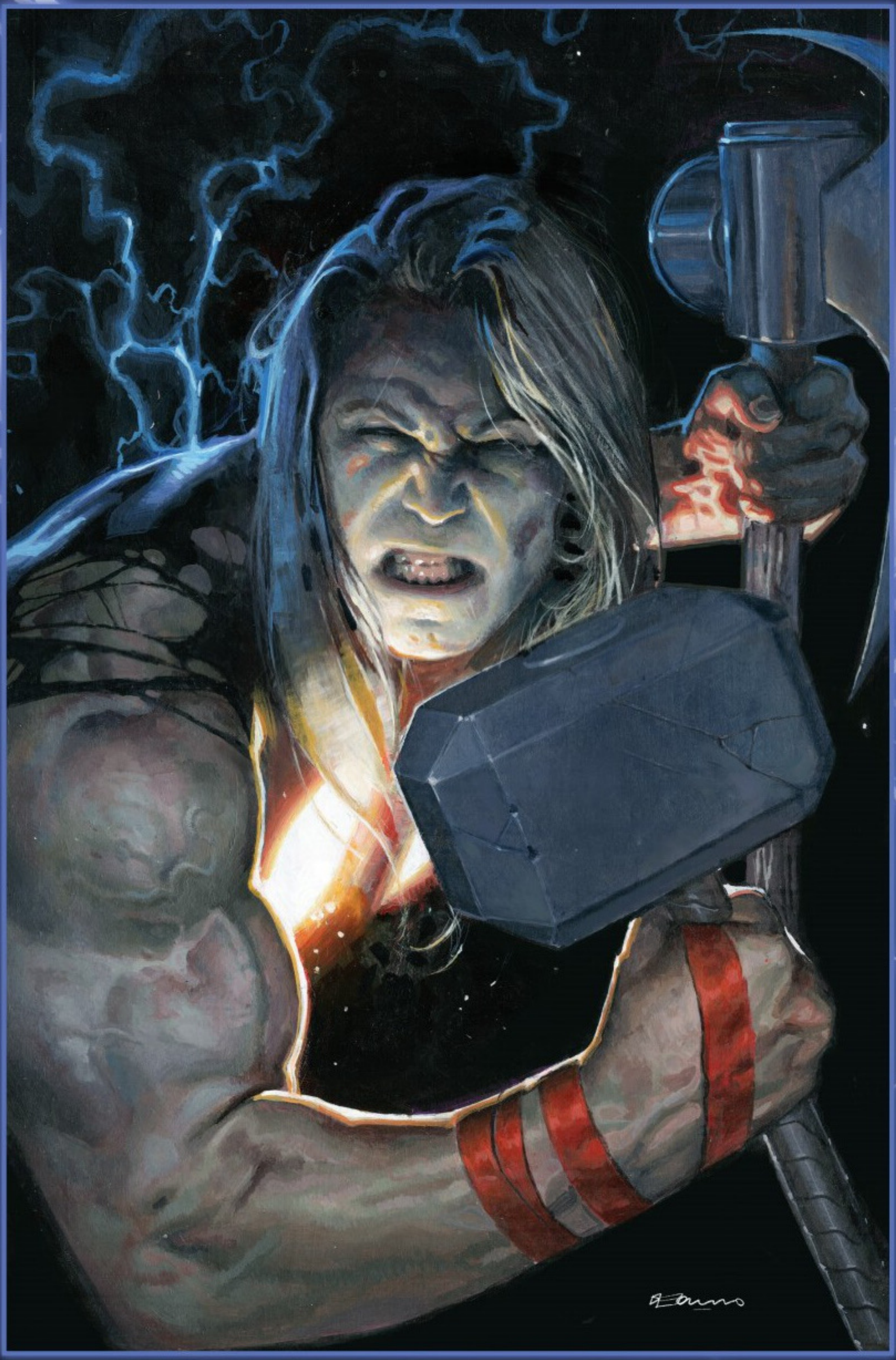

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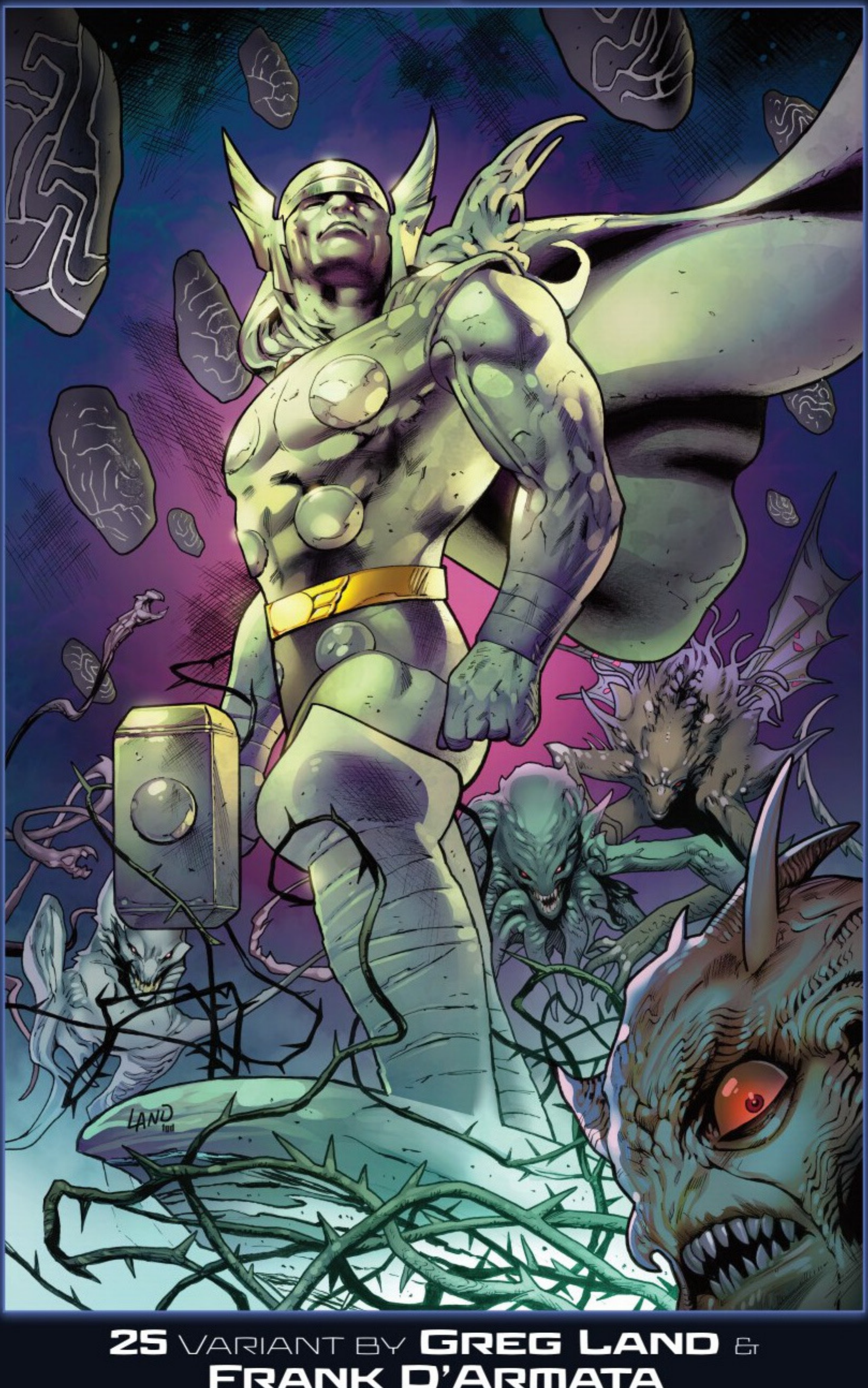

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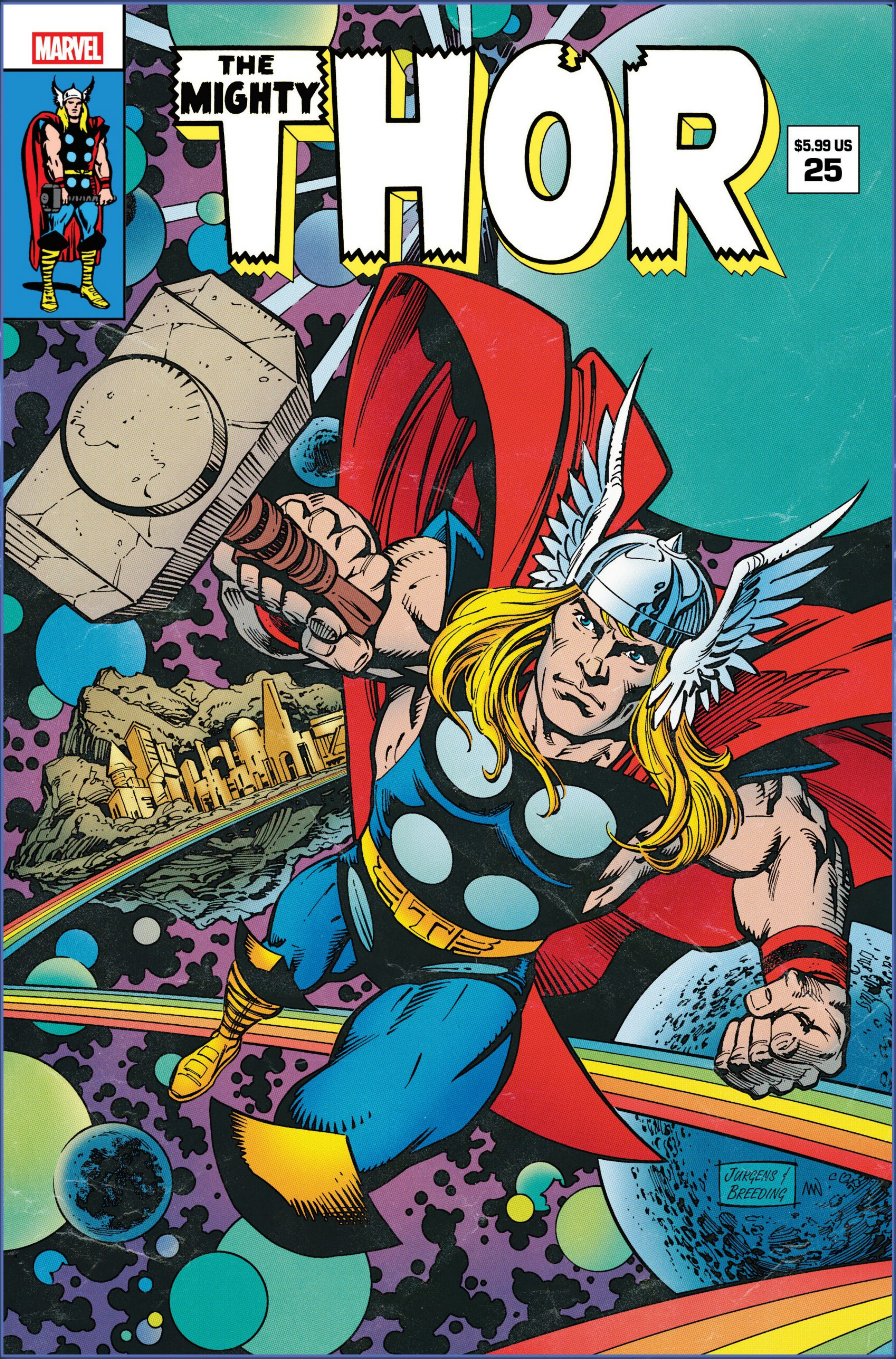
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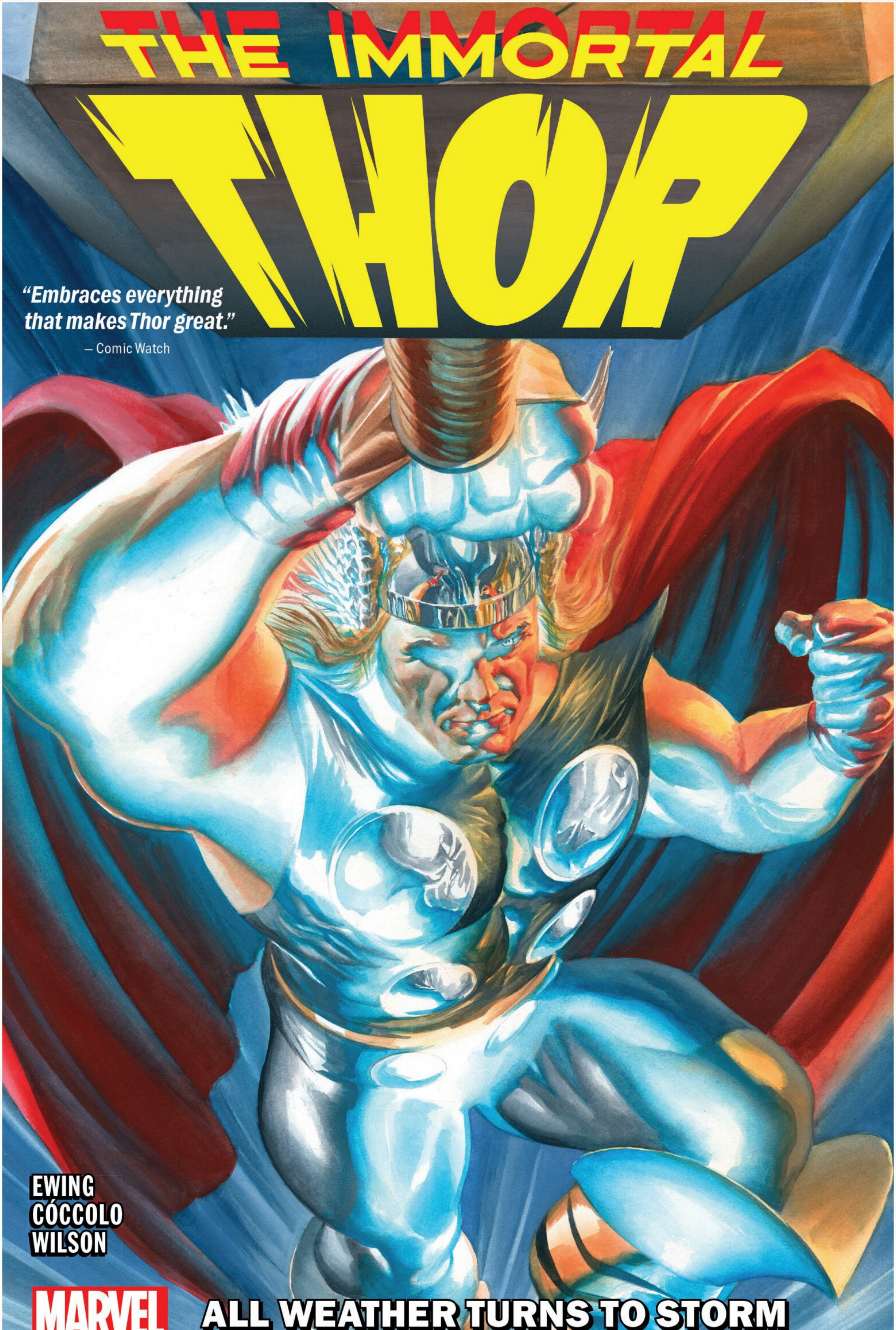
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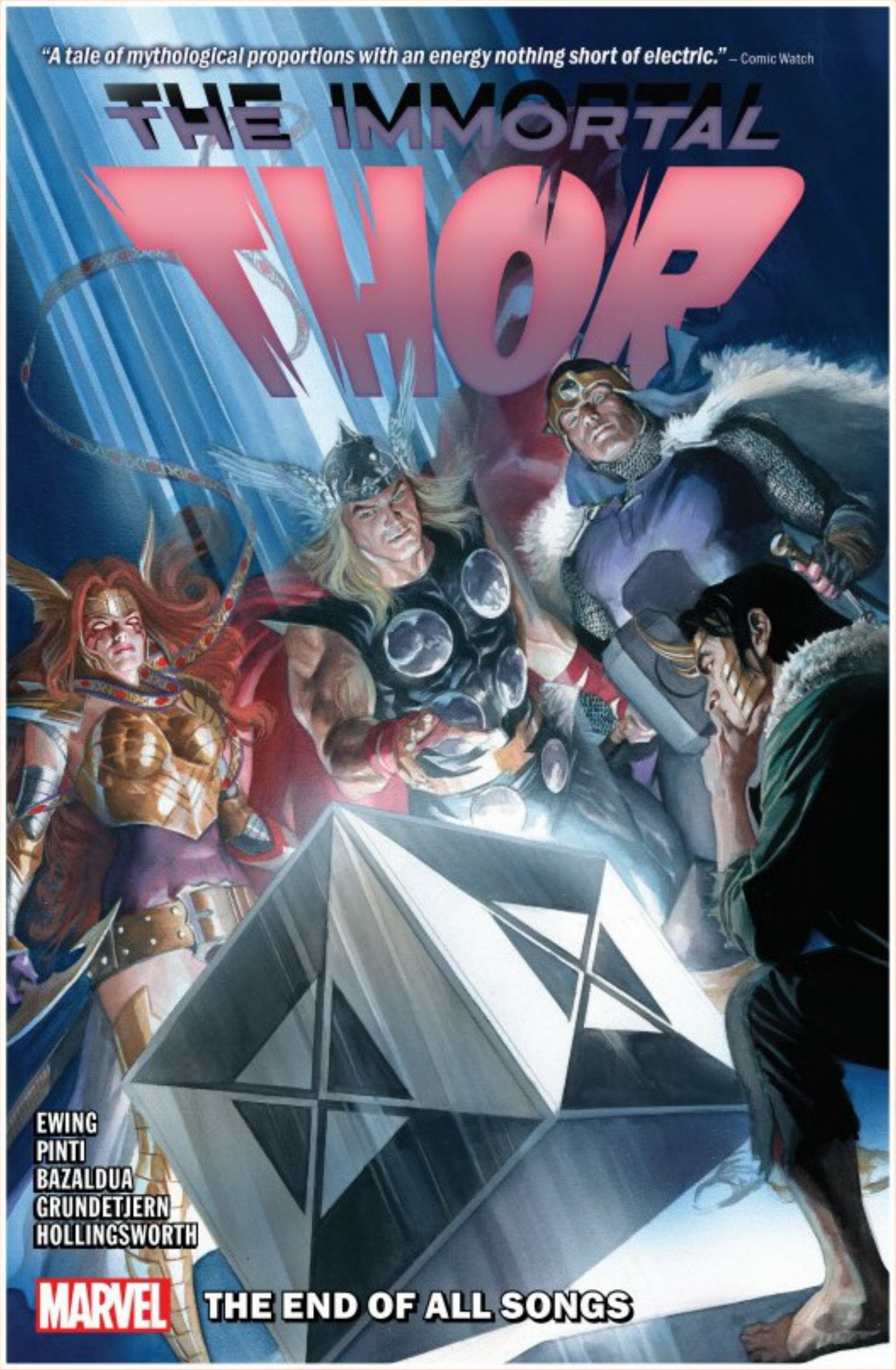
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